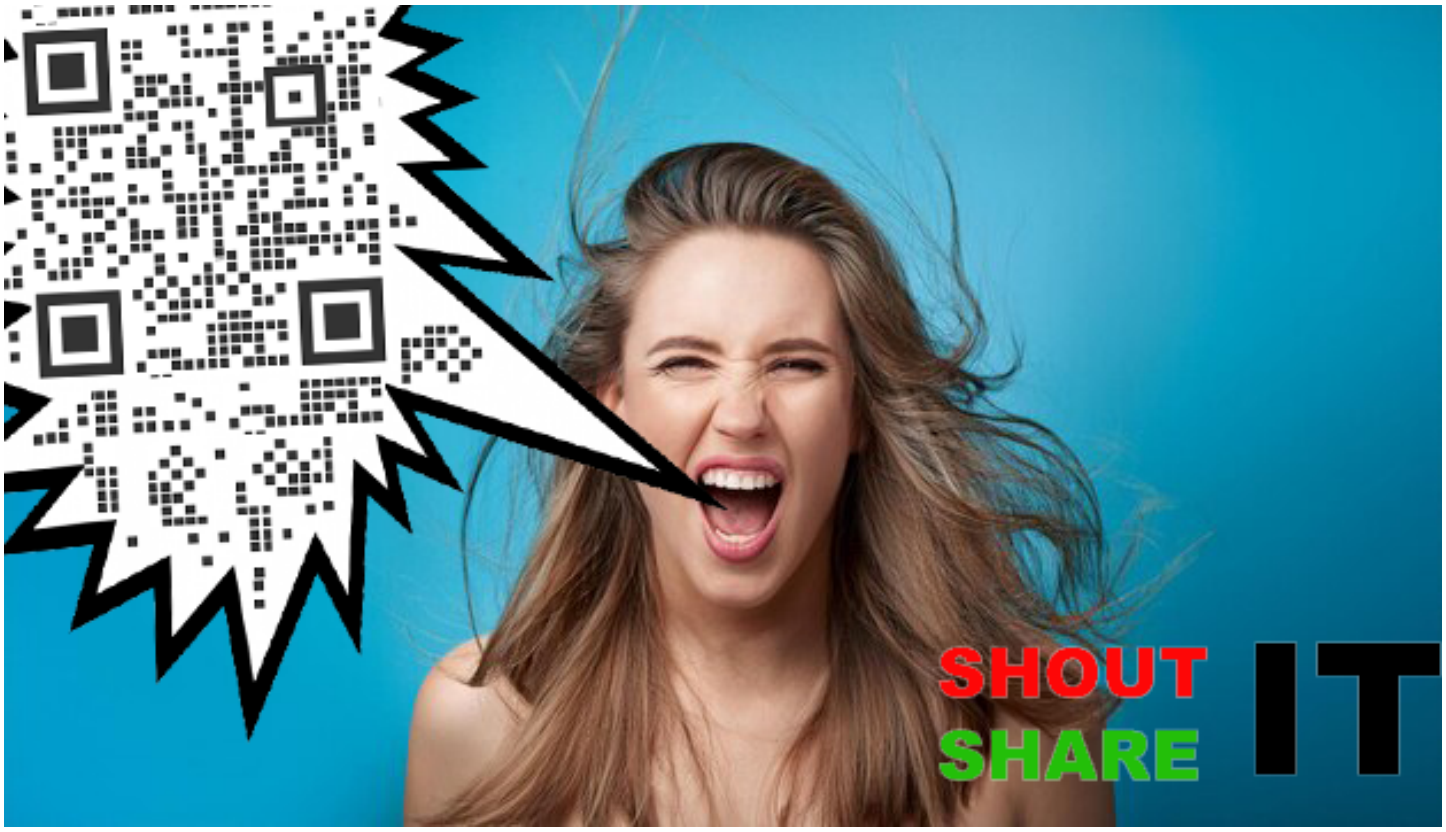
John Mitchiner

GURU

The Search for Enlightenment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The traditional Hindu concept of the Guru is today almost unrecognizable where some of India's most popular religious teachers are concerned. In this book, the product of years of research and study into the work and thought of the sixteen best-known Gurus from the subcontinent—Madame Blavatsky, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi, Chinmayananda, Sathya Sai Baba, Ramdas and Krishnabai, Bhaktivedanta, Muktananda and Gurumayi, Aurobindo and the Mother, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Dada Lekhraj Kripalani (founder of the Brahma Kumari movement) and Rajneesh — John Mitchiner analyses their teachings and the reasons for their appeal. Wide-ranging, informed, lucid and dispassionate, *Guru* is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the relevance and contribution of the major Indian Gurus to contemporary religious thought and experience.

The front cover shows (clockwise from top left): Rajneesh; Madame Blavatsky; Chinmayananda; Sathya Sai Baba; the Mother; Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; Ramakrishna; Bhaktivedanta; Muktananda.
The back cover shows (clockwise from top left): Vivekananda; Ramana Maharshi; Aurobindo; Krishnabai; Gurumayi; Brahma Kumari.
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Guru

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John Mitchiner

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For Liz

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Introduction

An introduction to the content and scope of what the reader is about to read is to a degree unnecessary in the case of the present subject—the Guru. Most readers will already have an acquaintance with at least some of the Gurus described in these pages, such as the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh and Sathya Sai Baba. The main object of this book is to acquaint the reader further with the lives and teachings of these and other Gurus; its second object is to offer some observations and criticisms. The reader will, I hope, be able to find in the following pages a reasonably objective and balanced account of each Guru. There are doubtless some readers who will be offended and affronted by the criticisms I have made and by some of the conclusions I have drawn about the personalities and teachings of the Gurus; but they will, I hope, appreciate that I have drawn such conclusions not simply through a desire to criticize but because such criticisms seem warranted. They are not the conclusions with which I started out on this study, but rather the conclusions to which the study itself inexorably and inescapably led. The Guru phenomenon is above all else something which needs to be studied seriously and dispassionately, not least in order to gain an understanding of why it should have such a widespread appeal, both in India and in the West. Such, then, is the approach and objective of the following pages.

The Guru is primarily and originally a Hindu phenomenon and it is with the Hindu context that this book is concerned. A great deal has been written in other contexts about, for example, the role of the Guru within the Sikh tradition, and there is in any case quite enough about the Guru within the Hindu tradition to more than sate the reader's appetite. I make no apology, therefore, for limiting the study in this way and not including non-Hindu teachers to whom the term 'Guru' may be applied.

As for my choice of which Gurus to study, there is of course a degree of subjectivity involved. In the first place, many of the Gurus I have

chosen are those I have met and spoken with; in addition most of the Gurus constitute the more well-known names; this is intentional, since it is primarily around these that the 'Guru cults' have arisen. I have not focused on the innumerable lesser-known yet sincere and devoted Gurus, often with small followings, since my intention is to present a fair cross section of Gurus whose teachings and personalities remain prominent today.

On the question of style, I have used the form 'he', 'his', 'man', etc. when referring generally to women as much as to men. I have done this largely to avoid the text becoming too cumbersome and pedantic and hope the reader will not be offended by this.

I have been interested for the past several decades in the teachings and personalities of the Gurus. On an earlier stay in India I spent several months travelling around the country visiting Gurus and their ashrams or religious establishments, which resulted in a series of articles published in 1978–79 entitled 'In Search of the God-men of India'. The present work began with Hilde Hunt, my wife's former German teacher who was visiting us in Delhi. 'A friend of mine has a friend called Mr Khushwant Singh, whom I promised to look up; I should like to meet him.' And so we did; and over tea and biscuits, the conversation turned to Gurus and to my earlier series of articles. It was primarily Khushwant and David Davidar who encouraged me to pursue this study, which has resulted in a further series of visits to ashrams since the summer of 1989. And above all I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife, Liz Ford, for her encouragement, for putting up with my prolonged absences and by no means the least, for her success in deciphering my handwriting and typing large sections of the book. To these, and to all in the various ashrams and centres, who spent time helping me with my research, go my sincere thanks.

CHAPTER I

The Hindu Background

The Guru phenomenon is anything but new. It stretches far back into the distant past of Hinduism, and is indeed one of the cornerstones of continuity within the religion. The Guru himself is a teacher—yet far more than that, he is the one who has gained enlightenment and can help his followers to do the same; the enlightened follower in turn becomes the Guru, and so the chain of teaching continues and is handed down across generations and millennia.

In order to understand the Guru, we must set the scene and understand the background against which he operates. Unlike most of the world's major religions, Hinduism has no single founder, no set starting date. Indeed the very idea of a particular date when the religion began is contrary to the whole tenor of Hinduism, which emphasizes cyclical continuity and the almost unending succession of birth, death and rebirth. Almost unending, because the goal for a Hindu is to find escape from this succession, to master it and be no longer bound by it; to escape from bondage to the endless wheel of time. Reality is itself relative: birth, life and death are themselves real enough, but underlying them is a thread of continuity and a deeper reality which it is the Hindu's task to perceive and realize; and through deeper meditation and other practices, to merge with that deeper reality as it exists within himself, thereby gaining release from the passing, changing and temporary reality of the world around. Time itself is a part of this semi-real phenomenal world around us, and ultimately has only a relative validity. With Hinduism, we enter into a new understanding of time and eternity.

According to the traditional Hindu reckoning, time is, in the first instance, divided into four Yugas or Ages—the Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali, rather like the gold, silver, bronze and iron ages of the Greeks. The present Kali or Iron Yuga lasts for 432,000 years: it is computed to have begun on 18 February 3102 BC. The preceding three Yugas, having been

more full of virtues and goodness, lasted for correspondingly longer periods, and the total length of the four Yugas is computed as 4,320,000 years. This complete cycle of the four Yugas is called a Maha Yuga or a Great Age. The end of this Kali Yuga witnesses as it were a new dawn, and the start of a new Krita Yuga. A thousand Maha Yugas constitute a single day in the life of Brahma, the creator-god, and herald the creation of a new universe; at the end of each Brahma-day the universe is destroyed, and there follows a night of Brahma, which lasts as long as his day. The lifetime of Brahma endures for one hundred Brahma-years of Brahma-days and -nights, and is followed by a cataclysmic universal dissolution. And out of this a new Brahma emerges, to live for a hundred years. . . .

Within this unending cycle of aeons and ages, man occupies a seemingly insignificant place on the stage of history. Yet in traditional Hinduism there is little sense of 'history' according to the Western understanding of the word; everyday events have little real meaning when set against the background of successive rebirths and the grand pattern of time. The earliest Hindu 'historical' writing (in the Western sense) is in fact Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* or the 'Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir', which was itself composed partly under Muslim influence around the tenth century AD. Even the great Mahabharata war, which can be dated archaeologically to around 900 BC, remains for most Hindus not so much a historical as a religious event and lesson, an event that ushered in the Kali Yuga in 3102 BC, and one that cuts across time and witnesses the workings of Karma and divine law on earth. In the Hindu view our perception of time is conditioned by the linear and evolutionary events in our lives. We have first to escape from this conditioning, to cut through our linear time-bound perception. Hinduism has an immense wealth of myths and stories on this theme which the Gurus are particularly fond of quoting. The following was told to me some years ago by Anandamayi Ma to illustrate how, although we get wrapped up in our day-to-day lives, sometimes events occur that cut across this routine and leave us wondering where reality actually lies:

> Once a rishi (sage) called Narada asked the god Vishnu to teach him about the unreality of life and the nature of time; so Vishnu decided to instruct Narada in a practical manner. He asked the rishi to fetch him a glass of water from a nearby well, and Narada obediently went off to perform this errand. As he was

drawing water from the well, a beautiful young girl came to fill her pitcher—and at the very first sight of her Narada fell deeply and helplessly in love. She beckoned to him and he followed her back to the house where she lived with her aged parents. They bade him welcome, urged him to stay, and so he remained for many days. After some time he took permission of the parents and married the girl. They lived happily together for many years and she bore him three children. One day Narada had to make a journey with his wife and children to a nearby village; it was raining heavily, and on the way they had to cross a wide river which had become a raging torrent swollen by the rains. They embarked on a boat, and Narada started rowing across the river; but just as the boat was in mid-stream, the driving current seized and capsized it, throwing them all into the swirling waters. Desperately Narada sought to grab hold of his wife and children, but to no avail—the current swept them away, and Narada himself was all but drowned before he managed to struggle to one of the banks and drag himself to safety. As he lay there, exhausted and in the depths of despair, he heard a voice calling him: 'Narada, Narada! Where is my glass of water? I have been waiting nearly two hours for it'.

This, then, is the backdrop and setting against which Hinduism takes to the stage of history. It is not that history has no meaning for the Hindu: rather that its meaning is evaluated against an infinitely longer perspective than in the West, and is dwarfed when set in the perspective of the unending succession of time. Yet even in the Western sense of history, Hinduism is old—older than any other living religion in the world. In the third millennium BC there flourished in the valley of the river Indus a major civilization unparalleled for its town planning and apparent social organization. The Indus Valley civilization was discovered by archaeologists only in the late-nineteenth century; it centered on two large cities, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, set some 500 miles apart on the river Indus in present-day Pakistan, and contained innumerable smaller towns and villages extending from the Baluchistan Hills of Pakistan–Iran in the west virtually to Delhi in the east and Bombay in the south. The Indus people traded and had several close cultural links with the Sumerians in Mesopotamia (now Egypt) and the Elamites in southern Iran, at a time well before the emergence of the great Chinese or Egyptian civilizations.

The Indus Valley civilization was in many respects a clear forerunner of later Indian civilizations. In particular, the religion of the Indus people focused on a widespread Mother Goddess cult, the veneration of certain animals, phallus worship, an emphasis on water and bathing, and what appears to be the worship of a Shiva-like deity who sits cross-legged in yogic posture. Here is a firm indication that certain strands in Hinduism, including some followed nowadays by the Gurus, were already common practice around 2500 BC.

The Indus Valley civilization was well into decline by around 1750 BC. Around that time, a group of newcomers appears on the scene. Settling originally in the area of the Punjab, it does battle with the local dark-skinned inhabitants, subdues them and takes to a life of agriculture and herd-tending from village settlements. These newcomers, the Indo-Aryans, composed many hymns in praise of their gods, entreating their help in battle and dedicating to them their sacrifices. These hymns are collected in the *Rig Veda,* the oldest and most sacred of Hindu scriptures. The religion of the *Rig Veda* has initially many points of similarity to Greek and other early Indo-European religions: it is often anthropomorphic, and worship of nature plays an important role. Thus there are gods or goddesses of sun and moon, of sky and the dawn, of rivers and of fire and earth. Rig Vedic religion centered on the performance of sacrifices accompanied by the recitation of hymns or chants, and gradually became formalized in the *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas*, composed around 1200–1000 BC. The sacrifice was performed by a Brahmin or priest and was a ceremony designed to gratify the god or gods who were also called upon to attend. The ceremony began with the kindling of the ritual fire, and various offerings were made, such as food, Soma (an intoxicating juice), and animals that were ritually slaughtered. In one of the most celebrated Vedic rituals a local ruler would set loose a horse to roam freely for a year: the horse was then ritually slaughtered, and all the land it had roamed across was claimed by its former owner. Many types of Vedic sacrifice are still practised in Hindu temples today; although they now rarely involve animal slaughter, there are nonetheless temples where this still takes place regularly, such as the offering of goats at the Kali temple at Kalighat in Calcutta.

Over the centuries, side by side with this sacrificial cult, there arose speculations on the nature of sacrifice, of the gods and of man himself. This trend is incipient even in the *Rig Veda*, and one of its most notable features is a growing emphasis on a single cosmic principle or God:

In the beginning the Golden Embryo evolved.
Once born, he was the one Lord of creation.
He held in place this sky and earth.
Who is the god we should worship with the offering?

When the mighty waters moved, bearing the embryo
That is All, bringing forth fire,
Then He evolved, the one vital breath of the gods.
Who is the god we should worship with the offering?

O Prajapati, Lord of Progeny! Only you
Encompass all these creatures.
Grant us the desires for which we make offering to you.
Let us be lords of riches.

(Rig Veda 10.121)

Then there was neither being nor non-being,
Neither space nor sky.
What stirred? Where? And under whose protection?
Was there water, unfathomably deep?

There was neither death nor immortality then.
There was no distinction between night and day.
The One breathed, windless, by its own power.
Nothing else existed other than that.

(Rig Veda 10.129)

Later *Rig Veda* hymns declare that, 'What is but One, the wise call by many names,' but increasingly the name that is given to this 'One' is either Prajapati, Lord of Progeny, or Brahman.

These speculations are developed more thoroughly in the Upanishads, a collection of writings composed mainly around 700–500 BC by ascetics and sages who turned their backs on the Vedic sacrificial cult and took to meditation and ascetic practices in order to perceive and realize the nature of reality. The Upanishads contain teachings which have become fundamental to Hinduism, and fundamental to many if not all contemporary Gurus. The essence of the teaching is relatively simple: underlying the everyday world of change there is an unchanging reality (Brahman); as we are a part of the everyday world, this reality lies also

within us (Atman); by meditating on this, we can realize this reality within us and in doing so become one with it. Again and again in the Upanishads, this message is made clear: Atman is Brahman, you are this (*tat tvam asi*). By achieving this mystical union, man achieves Moksha, release, or Nirvana, the extinguishing of his ties to the world of change and sorrow, release from the endless cycle of rebirth. This philosophy did not involve a denial of the gods: rather it subordinated them to a lower level, setting Brahman as supreme and the gods as props to help worshippers along the path towards realizing Brahman. When one Upanishadic sage called Yajnavalkya was asked how many gods there were, he replied:

> *'As many as are mentioned in the invocatory formula in the hymn to the All-gods—three hundred and three, and three thousand and three—3306.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'Thirty-three.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'Six.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'Three.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'Two.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'One and a half.'*
> *'Yes, but how many gods are there really, Yajnavalkya?'*
> *'One.'*
> *'Which is the one god?'*
> *'The breath of life, and that is Brahman, the beyond. So we have been taught.'*
>
> (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.9.1,9)

Many of the Upanishads come down firmly against sacrifice and ritualism:

> *These sacrificial forms are but unsafe boats,*
> *The eighteen (all the Vedic scriptures)*
> *Which describe inferior actions.*
> *The deluded who hail it as the best*
> *Return again to old age and death.*

Believing sacrifice and merit are the highest good
The fools know nothing better.
Having enjoyed the fruits of their good works in highest heaven,
They then come back to this world, or to a lower.

(Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.7,10)

As for the teaching itself, this is well-illustrated by the story of Shvetaketu who sought instruction from his father:

'Behold these rivers, my son! From east to west, from west to east they flow—from ocean to ocean. They become the ocean itself so that, once there, they no longer know "I am this one", "I am that one". Just so, my son, all living creatures, though they have come forth from Being, do not know that they have arisen out of Being. Whatever they are in this world, whether tiger or lion, wolf or boar, worm or moth, gnat or fly, that they become. That which is the finest essence, this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is the Self. You are that, Shvetaketu!'

'Put this piece of salt in the water and come to me tomorrow morning.' Shvetaketu did as he was told. Then his father said to him: 'Do you remember that piece of salt you put in the water yesterday evening? Please bring it here.' He groped for it but could not find it. It had completely dissolved.
'Taste it from this side. How is it?'
'Salt.'
'Taste it in the middle. What is it like?'
'Salt.'
'Taste it from the other side. How is it?'
'Salt.'
'Throw it away and then come to me.'
He did as he was told, saying: 'The salt remains the same.'
His father said to him: 'In the same way, my son, you cannot perceive Being but in truth, it is here. This finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is the Self. You are that, Shvetaketu!'

(Chandogya Upanishad 6.10, 13)

The types of speculation embodied in the Upanishads came later to be drawn together into a philosophical school called Vedanta (the 'end of the Veda'). This remains one of the main and most influential trends of thought in present-day Hinduism, and as such is central to the teachings of the Gurus.

There are three major themes running through the Hindu's approach to religion: Karma or action, Jnana or Knowledge, and Bhakti or devotion. While the Vedic sacrificial cult and Upanishadic speculation can be said to correspond predominantly to the first two of these, the third is perhaps most evident to the observer as the everyday worship and devotion to the many gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Classical Hinduism is expounded most fully in the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and in the collections of Puranas or Traditions, which were all composed between about 300 BC and AD 500. It recognizes a trinity of gods: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. In practice, Shiva combines the roles of destroyer and re-creator, and the majority of Hindus would claim to be followers of either Shiva or Vishnu. Neither god figures at all prominently in the *Rig Veda*, or indeed in the Vedic tradition as a whole; yet as was seen earlier, the cult of Shiva may well trace its origin to the Indus Valley civilization or beyond. It seems likely that both gods were originally non-Vedic deities who gradually gained acceptance within Brahminic priestly circles. Their success has been total. Classical Hinduism is replete with stories about the activities of these gods: the wild but serene, ascetic Shiva, his wife, Parvati and sons, Ganesh (the elephant-headed god) and Skanda (the war god); the more docile Vishnu and his wife, Lakshmi (goddess of prosperity), and Vishnu's ten incarnations on earth in order to destroy evil and set the world to rights. Most well-known of Vishnu's incarnations are those as Rama, hero of the *Ramayana*, who defeats the demon-king Ravana to rescue his kidnapped wife Sita from the demon's clutches; and as Krishna, who has a dual role as both deliverer of the citizens of Mathura from the tyranny of the wicked king Kamsa, and as the divine charioteer of the warrior Arjuna in the Mahabharata war who imparts to him the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita*—the cornerstone of Hindu devotionalism. The teachings of the *Gita*, rival, in a sense, those of the Upanishads in both popularity and content. They embody much Upanishadic speculation: but they also identify a personal God as the supreme reality, and while

proclaiming that one can, through meditation and devotion, realize the nature of God, they nonetheless tend to retain a distinction between the individual and God:

He who sees Me everywhere, who sees the All in Me,
For him I am not lost, nor is he lost for Me.

The source of all am I; from Me all things proceed.
Knowing this, the wise commune with Me, filled with love.

Not by the Vedas, or grim ascetic practice,
Not by the giving of alms or sacrifice
Can I be seen in such a form as you did see Me.
But I can be perceived through Bhakti (devotion)
Addressed to Me alone.

For I am the base supporting Brahman—
The Immortal which knows no change;
supporting too the eternal law of righteousness and bliss.

By love and loyalty he comes to know Me
As I really am, how great I am and who;
And once he knows Me as I am, he enters Me forthwith.
(Bhagavadgita 6.30, 10.8, 11.53-54, 14.27, 18.55)

The *Gita* is a work containing many diverse strands of teaching, and which is therefore open to differing interpretations. In many places it seems to follow a purely monistic line, based on the Upanishads, drawing no distinction between the individual soul and God. But it is passages such as those above which, by elevating to the highest level devotion to a personal God as greater even than Brahman, have given the *Gita* its predominant character as a devotional work and probably the most popular Hindu religious book.

These, then, are the three main trends in Hindu thought: sacrifice, self-knowledge and devotion. For most Hindus they are not at all mutually exclusive, but are closely interlinked and complementary to each other, and each can contribute in some measure towards the ultimate goal of realizing oneself and God. And yet there is a fundamental dichotomy and distinction when it comes to the goal itself: for, to put it at its simplest, to

become one with Brahman implies total union between the individual and the Absolute, whereas to stand in the presence of Shiva or Vishnu implies a degree of separation between man and God. The acknowledgement of this dichotomy and the attempt to get around it led to the founding of three main schools of thought, all of which come under the general heading of Vedanta. The first was that of Adi Shankaracharya (AD 788–820) who taught Advaita or Non-Dualism, a strictly monistic interpretation of the Upanishads and other scriptures in which there is total identity between Atman and Brahman, in which the individual is God without separation or distinction. The second was that of Ramanujacharya (C.AD 1017–1137) who taught that while man is of the same essence as God, he is nonetheless distinct from and dependent on Him; this teaching of both oneness and separation was called Vishishtadvaita or Qualified Non-Dualism. The third school, founded by Madhvacharya in the thirteenth century AD, was a development of the second and taught strict Dvaita or Dualism, in which the individual and God are eternally and completely distinct. Of these three schools, the first two enjoyed—and continue to this day to enjoy—the greatest influence and following and together continue to constitute the two leading trends of thought within Hinduism. Yet the dichotomy between them remains, often unacknowledged but nevertheless still there; and it is a dichotomy very evident, as we shall see, in the present-day teachings of the Gurus.

One popular Hindu attempt to account for this dichotomy is to cite the story of the blind men who touched different parts of an elephant, and were then asked to describe the reality of the elephant. Each described it in a different way, and each was correct in his description—yet each description was only partially true, since none of the blind men could encompass the full reality of the elephant. The story is often cited to account for the plethora of differing religious paths, sects, teachings and perceptions of God and reality both within and beyond Hinduism. Yet it raises a further complication, since it implies that none of the paths or religions currently in existence can tell the full story. Nonetheless there is of course an answer to this, inasmuch as the blind men needed a guide to take them along their path to the elephant: a guide who could himself see the totality of the elephant. This is in a sense where the Guru steps in. For the Guru is one who has already reached the goal, who has seen the vision of God and realized his own nature as divine; he is the enlightened master who holds within himself the key to unlock this experience for his

disciples, and who acts as the guide to others on the path.

The Hindu Guru has, traditionally, a number of roles to fulfil. He is first of all—indeed, first and foremost—a teacher. Trained in the Vedas and other scriptures, his prime role is to impart knowledge of those scriptures and to instruct others in their meaning. In this respect he stands as one in a long line of teachers, imparting to his successors the knowledge and insight which he has gained from his own teacher, who in turn gained it from his teacher; in this way a Guru can often trace his line of teaching back through successive teachers to the original, often divine, imparter of the teaching. This constitutes what is called the *Guru-shishya parampara*—the lineage of Guru-disciple succession, which helps to authenticate the Guru within his own tradition.

The Guru is, however, more than simply a teacher who is imparting what he himself has been taught. He is a teacher who has realized and experienced for himself the essence of that teaching—whose teaching is based on his own experience, and who then uses the scriptures to illustrate and describe that experience. He is a teacher who is himself an embodiment of the teaching, who is himself enlightened through the teaching; he can teach and point others towards the goal, because it is a goal which he himself has achieved, a goal which is present within himself. He can teach union with God or Brahman, because he is himself constantly in this union: he is thus both the pointer to the goal and at the same time also the goal itself. Thus successive scriptures teach that the Guru is himself God and should be treated as God: for one can say that, if the goal is to become one with God, and the Guru has achieved and is teaching that goal, the Guru must himself logically be God. In this role as the embodiment of the goal, the Guru becomes one who must be honoured both by his disciples and by secular as well as religious authorities. Hindu scriptures are full of accounts of the long devoted years spent by disciples at the feet of their Guru; of the gifts presented by disciples on both joining and leaving their Guru, and of the services rendered by the disciple to the Guru; of the great respect shown by kings to Gurus, extending on occasions to the elevation of Gurus to advisory positions of power within a king's entourage. All of these characteristics, which feature also with a number of present-day Gurus, can claim a considerable antiquity and scriptural precedent and are an extension of the Guru's role as an enlightened or divine figure.

The search for the Guru—for the enlightened master who can in turn

impart enlightenment to the disciple—can thus in one sense claim a long antiquity. Yet, it remained for centuries very much a minority activity, limited with a few exceptions to members of the Brahmin or highest caste who were traditionally expected to spend years studying at the feet of a teacher far away from the cares and worries of life. It is really only during the past century that the search for the Guru has widened and extended also to the West, where it has in recent years become something of a cult. Paradoxically perhaps, the Guru has assumed a new importance because of the West: the discovery of Hinduism by the West, largely pioneered—albeit in a rather strange manner—by the Theosophical Society in the late-nineteenth century, has in turn led to a rediscovery and reinvigoration of Hinduism, and to the emergence of a number of teachers and individuals within the Hindu tradition claiming to be enlightened and to be able to teach that enlightenment to others. It is these new Gurus who are the subject-matter of the following pages. Some, such as Rajneesh, have aroused great controversy within India as well as beyond it, and have been branded by many as charlatans, by others as enlightened sages. Others, such as Ramakrishna, would be accepted by most Hindus as well-established saints. All now have followings, often very sizeable, both in India and in the West, and at least one—the Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) movement—has a greater following in the West than in India. Yet all share one basic characteristic, namely that their success has been due to the demand among a great many spiritual searchers for an enlightened teacher who can impart that enlightenment to others.

CHAPTER II

The Nature and Appeal of the Guru Cults

I

The Guru has for centuries and millennia been a respected and familiar figure in India. His authority and influence have derived above all from the many long years spent studying and meditating with his own teacher or Guru: years of studying and memorizing the scriptures, years of meditating on the nature of the soul and God, years of striving for the ultimate experience of God or Brahman as described in the scriptures. After so many years spent gaining spiritual knowledge and experience, few Hindus would deny that such a man must be of considerable spiritual wealth. For in India, even a pandit—a man learned in the scriptures—is deemed worthy of high respect; while one who has not only studied and memorized the scriptures but has fully understood and even experienced their inner meaning ranks far above that. The Guru's position is even higher still: for the Guru claims to have experienced the ultimate union of which the scriptures speak, and to be a living and constant embodiment of that experience—to be an embodiment of Brahman or God, who can impart the secret and the path to that experience to his disciples. He is therefore himself worthy of the respect due to God—and in India, he usually gets just that.

It is easier to understand this apparently exaggerated respect paid to the Guru when he is placed within his Indian social context. Indian—and more specifically Hindu—society is one of the most intricately stratified social systems in the world. The Hindu social hierarchy, which was already in the process of formulation by the Indo-Aryans around 1000 BC, was codified and set out in the Hindu Law books, particularly the Laws of Manu, around the start of the Christian era and has been rigidly enforced ever since. The hierarchy consists of four main castes: the Brahmins or

priests, the Kshatriyas or warriors, the Vaishyas or traders, and the Shudras or serfs. These caste divisions are hereditary and unchangeable, and are largely linked with occupation or activity. Thus if you are born a Vaishya, you will inherit the trading occupation of your father, and you and your children will remain Vaishyas until you die. This in the Hindu context is Dharma or eternal law; and as the *Gita* teaches, it is better to perform the Dharma of your own caste badly than to even attempt to perform the duties of another caste well. The rigidity of the system was gradually refined still more highly through the various sub-divisions or classes within the castes, whereby each occupational group—be they goldsmiths, flower-sellers or sweepers—occupied their own niche and level within their caste. At the top of this hierarchy are the Brahmins: the priestly caste, traditionally entrusted with studying the scriptures and teaching them, selectively, to those in the two lower castes (Shudras were forbidden to study or even hear the scriptures recited, and were punished if they did so by having boiling oil poured into their ears). The Brahmins also were entrusted with composing the scriptures, and with overseeing the smooth operation of the system. And the Guru is by traditional definition a Brahmin, and the most respected of Brahmins at that—a Brahmin who is learned in the scriptures, who teaches the scriptures, and who is himself, through identity with Brahman, the living embodiment and repository of both the scriptures and their teachings.

In more recent times, and following the lead given especially by the Bhakti movement, it has become more accepted for Gurus to come from non-Brahmin backgrounds. Yet even this has scriptural precedent in the story of the Kshatriya Vishvamitra who became acknowledged as a Brahmin because of his rigid asceticism and eventual union with Brahman; so too the Guru, because he has merged his true nature with Brahman, is de facto a Brahmin and an embodiment both of scriptural knowledge and of the ever-present experience of union with Brahman or God.

The family too remains all-important within the Hindu social context. The parents, particularly the father, retain total power and authority over the children, who would often not dream for one minute of going against the father's wishes and decisions, not only in childhood but throughout adult life as well. For most Hindus, it is still the parents who choose whom their children will marry; and even in adulthood, a son would choose not to smoke a cigarette in the presence of his father. Parental authority, like

priestly authority, is an integral part of the hierarchical system; and when a disciple comes to a Guru, he accepts the Guru in both priestly and parental roles, thereby according him, as it were, a dual and thus doubly-reinforced role of authority and power over him.

Education has traditionally been exclusively in the hands of the Brahmins; and the form of that education has been primarily the learning of the scriptures as the prime authority for everyday life. The Brahmin has held the key to knowledge: as such he has been the most respected and revered individual whose teachings were accepted without question, since they were based upon infallible scriptures. Despite the efforts of Ambedkar, Gandhi and others to break down the rigidity, caste remains a powerful, resilient and emotive force in India today. Untouchability is officially outlawed by the Indian Government, and the universities and Civil Service reserve quotas for Harijans, lower, backward and scheduled castes and tribes. Yet this has in many respects done little to alter basic caste attitudes or dampen inter-caste rivalries, as can so often be seen in the levels of success achieved by those who take up the quotas. The violence which erupted across India in 1990 when the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh attempted to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission on increasing the percentage of slots reserved for scheduled castes and other backward classes, which contributed in large measure to the fall of the V. P. Singh Government, vividly illustrated how easily emotions continue to be whipped up on caste issues, and how prominent and controversial a subject it remains today.

The Indian educational system has also yet to escape from its centuries-old Brahminical strictures: its emphasis remains on learning by rote, on unquestioning acceptance of what is taught in the books and by the teachers, on dependence upon received wisdom and on an uncritical lack of innovation. This was, and still is, the prime method of learning in India: and it is the method which the Gurus have inherited and which they accept and adopt. Hence when the Gurus claim to be the recipients of received wisdom, this claim is rarely questioned, but is rather accepted and taken for granted—they are after all the teachers, the authorities, and if they can quote the scriptures, their teachings must be true. And since the scriptures teach that the enlightened individual becomes one with God, it is quite acceptable for a Guru to claim 'I am God', since such a claim is built into the system and has full scriptural authority.

The Guru, then, has a popular appeal within India not only as a holy

and saintly man, but as one who has experienced and who continues to experience union with God or ultimate reality, and who is himself, in a sense, God on earth. This status is endorsed and ratified by individuals at all levels within the system, not least by those in secular power—the politicians. There has always been a close interaction in the Indian tradition between the religious and secular powers, the Brahmins and the kings. The king has needed the Brahmin—and the popular support behind the Brahmin—to sanctify and ratify him in office; while the Brahmin has needed the king or secular power to support and pay for his religious activities and to uphold his authoritative role among the people. In today's India, the king has become president and prime minister: yet there is not a politician, from Jawaharlal Nehru to Rajiv Gandhi, from Mahatma Gandhi to P.V. Narasimha Rao, who does not pay at least lip-service to Brahmins in general and more specifically to one or more of the Gurus in this book. Indeed, in many cases it goes far deeper than mere lip-service, and extends to a patronage and personal devotion, one effect of which is to augment in the public eye the status and authority of both Guru and politician.

This process of interaction between Guru and politician contains of course an element of risk, primarily because it can be abused in the hands of an unscrupulous individual who claims to be a Guru. A recent example of this is the case of Chandraswami (Nemi Chand Jain), who claims to be an enlightened tantric Guru who can obtain great benefits for those who would believe and follow him. In this guise he reportedly managed to gain the confidence of such individuals as Adnan Khashoggi; the Sultan of Brunei—to whom he promised a son but who obtained a daughter; Mark Thatcher—over the sale of Harrods; and Pamella Bordes—whom he lured into the Khashoggi connection. Within India, he allied himself successively with Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi, supporting and actively aiding their attempts to topple the Janata Government and to defeat the V.P. Singh Opposition (the first successfully, the latter without success). Fortune turned against him, however, and exposed him; Chandraswami fled India, allegedly towards his several numbered bank accounts, leaving his secretary, Mamaji (Kailashnath Agarwal), behind bars in Delhi's Tihar Jail. Yet he still retains political friends and allies, and shortly after Chandra Shekhar became Prime Minister in 1990, the newspapers were reporting that Chandraswami had not only returned to India but was playing a prominent role in the controversial attempts to establish a Ram

temple in Ayodhya. In one of his early prime ministerial press conferences, Chandra Shekhar was reported as coming out strongly in defence of Chandraswami. Few other 'Gurus' have been as blatantly secular and hungry for power and money as Chandraswami in their activities. Yet it is a feature common with most of them to have some degree of political connection and support—and it is a feature which again has scriptural backing and is thus, in India, an accepted part of the Guru cult.

II

So much, then, for why the Guru should have such an appeal within India, his spiritual home. It is worth spending a moment to consider also what can account for his appeal in the West, to an audience not steeped in Hindu traditions and cultural suppositions.

One reason, albeit in a sense a negative one, lies in the spiritual poverty of Christianity—more specifically, in the spiritual poverty of the type of Christianity prevalent from the late-nineteenth century. The Christian tradition has in fact a great wealth of spirituality, manifested especially in the writings of the Desert Fathers, of medieval Eastern Orthodox thinkers, and of such mystics as Theresa of Avila. Yet in the nineteenth century, Western Christianity—both Catholic and Protestant—had become very largely a religion based on dogmas, reason and ritual performance. The emphasis lay in attendance at services, on the following of an ethical code of good conduct and on the largely unquestioned acceptance of certain beliefs, doctrines and dogmas based on scriptural precedent. It had become very much a rational and rationalized religion: and where reason conflicted with experience—as for Catholics in the case of the Virgin Birth—experience was subordinated to belief and faith in the authority of the teachings of the Church. Man could speak and pray to God in a rational manner: yet it was always the priest or pastor who stood closer to God, and who regulated man's communication and communion with God.

It was against this type of background that the West suddenly started becoming aware, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, of the wisdom of the East: through the secular translations of scriptures by such scholars as Max Mueller, and through the teachings of the Theosophical

Society, of Swami Vivekananda and others. And Westerners brought up in a rational Christian tradition began to learn of the possibility of obtaining direct personal experience of God without any intermediary between themselves and God, an experience through which they might themselves become one with God. Western Christianity had in a sense let down its followers, by relegating religious experience to a relatively unimportant level and subordinating it to a plethora of doctrines, beliefs and practices. Now Hinduism was offering a way to cut through the doctrines and lay full emphasis on personal experience and self-fulfilment.

An added attraction for some lay in the almost magical fascination of initiation into an often exotic eastern cult: an initiation which signalled their belonging to and acceptance within a circle whose members, like themselves, shared common outlooks and goals. For many, this sense of acceptance and belonging afforded a strong psychological and emotional security often lacking in Western religious communities. Furthermore, this wisdom of the East which they were on the road to exploring, had the backing of centuries of tradition; it could claim an antiquity and continuity far greater than that of Christianity—and the proof of its validity could be tested and experienced by anyone. Was it therefore surprising that so many, already disillusioned with the stagnancy of Western Christianity, turned instead to this tradition centering on personal experience of God?

A further attraction for many Westerners lay in being able to have an enlightened personal authority—a Guru—to follow and surrender to; a Guru who would tell them not what and how to believe, but how to gain the experience for which they yearned. Having set their backs on their own tradition, they needed a guide to lead them through the, at first sight, bewildering variety of paths within the Hindu tradition: and there was no lack of Gurus willing to perform this role. Many of the Gurus had a personal charisma which added also to their attraction—a charisma nurtured by the traditional high esteem in which any saintly figure is held in India. And as the Guru's following increased in numbers, so in turn, did his esteem and the aura of authority which surrounded him. It was an all-win situation for the Guru.

Not least too was the attraction of the paths enunciated by the Gurus for their followers. Many of these afforded an escape not only from the humdrum everyday existence of the West, but from the Western over-emphasis on material existence and success, on the goals of the

acquisition of goods and position, often at the expense of pursuing personal fulfilment and meaning in life. Some Gurus, notably Rajneesh, boosted their attractiveness by incorporating many different psychotherapeutic and oriental-mystical methods into their teachings, which again helped to boost their appeal to Western audiences. It was above all the 1960s reaction against materialist aims and goals which induced Westerners on a large scale to seek out the more spiritual approaches long advocated in the East—and which rocketed the Gurus into international prominence.

The turning of Westerners to the Guru cults represents more than anything else a defiant reaffirmation of individualism and of the permanent and absolute value of the individual. In a century where individual human worth has been seemingly trodden underfoot by successive wars and uprisings, by pogroms and concentration camps, and by the impersonality of bureaucracies and governments; for generations who have witnessed the wanton massacres of individuals in Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Vietnam, and been brought up with the faceless and senseless visions of Franz Kafka, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre; for these, the seeking out of the Guru arises from the same need as others sought to satisfy through protest songs, revolutionary activities, drugs or sex—the need for the West to re-establish and reaffirm that the individual is of value and worth. And it is this need which the Guru has been able to satisfy in its entirety, by teaching that the value of the individual is absolute insofar as the individual—the part—is identical with the whole. The West has yet to assimilate fully the import and significance of this lesson: until it does, and until it finds a way to satisfactorily harmonize the needs and aspirations of the individual for personal meaning and fulfilment with the everyday workings of a bureaucratically-ordered and materialistically result-oriented society, the Guru will continue to attract through his promises of being able to provide personal fulfilment and meaning.

III

It has become common parlance among contemporary Gurus—and certainly among all those in this book—to claim that all religions are the same; to claim that the paths may differ, but that the goal of all religions

is one. This claim has been taken up favourably by many Christian and other non-Hindu religious thinkers, and pervades much current religious thought both within and outside India. Yet I shall have cause to criticize this approach in the following pages, where I have branded it as a form of intellectual dishonesty. The dichotomy arises primarily between the Non-Dualist Upanishadic approach—followed by Shankara and by such contemporary Gurus as Chinmayananda—which claims that there is no ultimate separation between the individual soul (Atman) and God (Brahman); and the Qualified Non-Dualism evident in parts of the *Bhagavadgita*—and followed by Ramanuja and such Gurus, as Bhaktivedanta—which claims that the individual and God are closely linked but remain, ultimately to some degree, separate. There is indeed no way to harmonize these two approaches, other than to say that one is inferior to the other, that one is an incomplete experience. It is impossible to claim that the ultimate experience of Christianity or Islam—the experience of being in the presence of God—is the same as the Upanishadic monist experience of being one with God without separation. The Sufi mystic Al-Hallaj sought to make the claim 'I am God' within a Muslim context—and was crucified for his blasphemy. It is contrary to the entire tenor and thinking of the Koran, as indeed of both Old and New Testaments; and the only way in which these can be harmonized with a monistic approach is to say that either one or the other represents only a partial perception of truth—which in turn negates the original claim that the religions have the same ultimate goal.

This claim that the goal of all religions is one, first put forward by Madame Blavatsky and taken up in strength by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, is nonetheless all-pervasive among contemporary Gurus. Many point to this as an example of the great tolerance of the Hindu religion: yet it bears a little deeper inspection than this. Let us first look at the goal of life, as propounded by various religions. In such religions as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, the goal is to live one's life in accordance with God's laws, dealing fairly and morally with one's fellow-men, making the most of whatever gifts God has given, and knowing that the goal at the end of this life is to be worthy enough to achieve heaven and stand in the presence of God. For the Hindu, however, the best that can be achieved in the present life is to escape from rebirth—which can be gained generally only by renunciation of the world. Those who do not renounce the world in this life (namely the vast majority of Hindus) are nonetheless aware that whatever material success and

benefits they may gain are of little ultimate account, since the main thing that matters is to abandon all ties to the world in order to realize one's true nature. Whereas in Christianity, Islam and Judaism the goal lies through and at the end of this life, in Hinduism it lies beyond and outside it—a divergence of outlook which has far-reaching effects, often not consciously acknowledged at least in India, on attitudes towards development and progress within society. These religions thus differ fundamentally in outlook towards life in the world; and the more *laissez-faire* approach of Hinduism is also reflected in its apparent tolerance of other religions and beliefs. For one can see exactly what that tolerance amounts to by looking at how it is proclaimed by the Gurus: by Vivekananda, who so vigorously proclaimed the oneness of religions yet announced that he sought to create a European society with India's religion; by Chinmayananda, who implicitly subordinates a devotional approach to his monistic teachings; by Sathya Sai Baba, who proclaims that his own religion, with him as God, is the fulfilment of all others; by Muktananda, who in proclaiming the oneness of religions proclaims also that the Christian must give up all feeling of belonging to Jesus; or by Rajneesh, who openly proclaimed himself as the enlightened master superior to Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha and their religions. So too with the Hindu acceptance of Christianity as an inspired religion, which at its very best accepts Jesus as an avatar of Vishnu. In short, the much-vaunted tolerance of Hinduism often amounts to little more than an intellectual arrogance which seeks to absorb other viewpoints by claiming that they are the same as its own but in practice subordinating them to itself. It is perhaps more than anything else, this often subtle intellectual arrogance, so manifest in the teachings of the Gurus, which has given back to Hinduism its self-respect: a self-respect which was much undermined by successive Muslim and European colonizers. And through their intellectually arrogant approach, and the success which it has achieved, the Gurus have perhaps unwittingly set the stage for the type of Hindu fundamentalist revival and resurgence of Hindu Raj which India is today witnessing. The Ram Janmabhoomi controversy and the right being claimed by Hindu religious leaders to construct a temple where there is currently a mosque over Rama's supposed birthplace in Ayodhya, is symptomatic of a growing Hindu self-confidence and militancy, evident also in the increasing claims that India is for the Hindus: demands which may yet prove too powerful for the politicians to halt, just as they are so

far proving ineffectual to stem the growing tides of inter-caste violence and of wife- and widow-burning (not that wife-burning has any scriptural precedent; but the lack of condemnation of this now everyday event is symptomatic of the low role of women within the traditionally male-dominated Hindu patriarchal society). Things in India often happen by default rather than by design; and it would seem to be primarily by default that the Gurus' claims as to the oneness of religious goals, which have so boosted their popularity, have been allowed to stand unchallenged for so long. Yet it is surely time that these claims were acknowledged to be founded on intellectual dishonesty and to be symptomatic not of a tolerance of other religions but of a subtle manoeuvre to absorb and subordinate other religions to the teachings of each Guru.

IV

In the following chapters I have given at some length an account of the lives and personalities of each Guru: for these reveal much about the ways in which the Gurus subsequently act and teach. There is, with many of them, an evident thirst for power and for self-acclaim, frequently from an early age. All the Gurus witness to the often self-deceptive strength of their desire to be God—and for most, to be acknowledged as divine by their followers. Most, if not all, are undoubtedly sincere in their beliefs. Yet this sincerity, which itself helps to attract followers, can also be dangerously self-deceptive, as is evident especially in the case of Aurobindo who invented a goal which neither he nor his followers could attain. The dangers lurking behind sincerity of belief have been well illustrated in the sects of Charles Manson and of Jim Jones in Guyana. Not that any of the Guru cults in this book have tended or are likely to tend to such extremes: yet, they are nonetheless, particularly in the case of Rajneesh, milder and more orderly versions of a similar phenomenon. More orderly, because they are based upon an established tradition, namely the Hindu tradition, rather than purely on the beliefs, revelations and teachings of one founder. Yet the Guru cults are a comparable phenomenon, insofar as the Guru proclaims himself as enlightened and promises that he can lead his followers to that same goal.

There are undoubtedly many who have benefited and found personal fulfilment by following the teachings and practices enjoined by the Gurus. Many of these practices might as easily be adopted and propounded in a

secular psychotherapeutic or meditational context—indeed, many of them have been. But at the same time many individuals have been harmed psychologically by blind and sincere devotion to a Guru who has then turned out to be less than he claimed. Many years have been wasted in trying to find meaning behind a Guru's words: but equally, many lives have been fulfilled in following the paths set out by the Gurus. So long as the secular world cannot satisfy aspirations for the reaffirmation of the absolute value of the individual: so long as there are those, in East and West, who search for an authority and guide who claims to be in communion with God or his soul and who promises to offer this same experience of personal enlightenment to his followers: for so long, the future looks bright for the Guru.

CHAPTER III

Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society

Madras, capital of the southernmost state of India—Tamil Nadu, spares the visitor much of the chaotic and frenetic activity characteristic of Indian cities further north. Like its people, it has a certain dignity, charm and friendliness; stretching along the shores of the Indian Ocean which make a popular evening promenade for its citizens, it has resisted all attempts to make it yet another concrete jungle and retains innumerable pleasant yet unexpected pockets of tropical greenery and palms. It was here that the British established one of their earliest settlements in India, based at Fort St. George now in the northern part of the city. A few miles to the south lies the leafy suburb of Adyar, once a separate village but now absorbed into greater Madras. Here, looking out across the Adyar river and set in the heart of 249 acres of lush tropical parkland, lie the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. A broad, tree-lined avenue leads from the entrance of the estate to the stately and rambling nineteenth century planter's mansion, now housing a collection of memorabilia of the Society and used periodically as a lecture and meeting centre. Hidden elsewhere in the estate are the various houses and administrative offices of the Society, and a library containing many valuable books and manuscripts acquired during the course of the past century. Adyar, like much of the rest of the city, has a certain timeless feel to it: as if it is a place where nothing much happens, yet you can come away feeling all the more enriched for that. A suitable place, perhaps, for silent thought and meditation, and for setting up the headquarters of a society whose central aim is to explore 'theosophy' or the wisdom about God.

Theosophy and the Theosophical Society were the brainchild of Helena Petrovna Rottenstern Hahn, later Blavatsky. She was born at midnight on 30–31 July 1831 at Ekaterinoslav in Russia. She was a gifted

pianist and was married in 1845 at the age of seventeen to a much older man, General Nicephore Blavatsky. The marriage was not of her choosing: she tried to run away from him on the journey to their new home, and after only three months she fled in disguise to Egypt. There she studied magic with an aged Copt and joined a secret society called 'The Druses of Lebanon'; over the next few years she delved deeper into spiritualism while working in such capacities as head of an artificial flower factory, and after repeated efforts, spent 1867–1870 in Tibet with various 'masters' from whom she acquired some knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism. Returning to Cairo in 1871 she tried unsuccessfully to found a spiritual society; she then spent two years as 'Madame Laura' giving concert tours in Italy and Russia, and after a brief stay with her brother in Paris she went in 1875 to New York—on the inner orders of 'The Brothers'—where she rapidly lost her roubles in an unsuccessful business venture in a Long Island farm. Involving herself in occult and spiritual phenomena, she met Henry Steel Olcott in October 1874 who was also interested in investigating spiritual phenomena. He had previously worked as an agriculturist, a journalist, a non-combative official in the Civil War, rising to the rank of Colonel, and then as a lawyer. Together they investigated a number of spirit and seance phenomena, and Blavatsky started holding lecture-meetings in her New York apartment. In the following year they founded the Theosophical Society 'to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe'. From the start, and right up to today, the Society had no single creed, and each member was free to believe whatever he wished; its objectives were eventually formulated as: to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour; to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science; and to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man. Olcott was the Society's first president and quickly attracted press and public criticism, particularly for the way he handled the dying wishes of Baron de Palm, an elderly member who pledged to leave his estate to the Society. De Palm wanted to be cremated—a somewhat unusual request at that time—and Olcott held large gatherings for both the 'Pagan funeral' and, six months later when he finally arranged it, the cremation; as the press commented, 'Baron de Palm has been principally famous as a corpse', and became almost notorious when it emerged that his estate would not even cover the funeral expenses. Blavatsky was busy

meanwhile writing the first of her two main works, *Isis Unveiled*, which was published in 1877 and ran through three editions within a year.

Following contacts with Swami Dayananda, who in 1875 had founded the Hindu reform movement called the Arya Samaj, Olcott agreed to unite the two societies under the name 'The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India', and plans went ahead to move the Society's headquarters to India. The union was in fact short-lived, and was dissolved by Dayananada on discovering that the Society was interested in secret knowledge and powers rather than religious experience; but Blavatsky and Olcott, spurred by insolvency and bad press, set sail for India in December 1878. Their first three years were spent based in Bombay, from where they toured and spread the message of Theosophy, particularly in Sri Lanka; in 1882 they moved to a twenty-seven acre site in the Adyar suburb of Madras, which has since then remained the headquarters of the Society. During the next two years Blavatsky lectured and produced psychic manifestations there, assisted by a couple named the Coulombs; in 1884 she and Olcott went to England, where all was going successfully until scandal erupted when the Coulombs denounced Blavatsky's phenomena as frauds. After a brief but unsuccessful visit to India to try and salvage the situation, Blavatsky finally returned for good to England, branded by the Society for Psychic Research one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting impostors of history. Here in 1888 she published her second great work, *The Secret Doctrine*, supposedly based on the unknown *Book of Dzyan*. In the same year she founded the Esoteric Society, naming Annie Besant as her successor; and she died not long after in 1891.

Besant was the divorcee of an Anglican priest and had thereafter been by turns an ardent atheist and Fabian socialist. Now a convert to Theosophy, she was drawn especially to Hindu philosophy and ideas, and published her own translation of the *Bhagavadgita* in 1895. When Olcott died in 1907, Besant was elected the next president of the Society, and held that office until her own death in 1933. Under her leadership and organizing talent, the Society's estate expanded to its present 249 acres. Based on her knowledge of the *Gita*, she believed that she had discovered the latest avatar of the god Vishnu in a young Hindu boy named Jiddu Krishnamurti who had been brought to her attention by a prominent Theosophist named C. W. Leadbeater. Together they adopted him and groomed him for his new role, until in 1939—at the age of

thirty-two—Krishnamurti announced that he was not an avatar, and left to proclaim his own school of thought.

This whole episode brought much criticism both to the Society and to Besant and Leadbeater. In the intervening years Besant had also devoted herself to working for Indian home rule, and was elected president of the Indian National Congress in 1917. But her middle-class intellectual approach and willingness to settle for something less than full independence led to her later ousting by Gandhi. Leadbeater also aroused further controversy for advice given to young boys on sexual matters, notwithstanding which he become a bishop of the Old Catholic Church, and later a canon of the Liberal Catholic Church which he founded. A schism erupted when the American branch of the Society split off under William Judge and his successor Katherine Twigley over disagreements about Besant's leadership of the Society. Nonetheless the Theosophical Society actively continues today to promote the goals of knowledge established by Blavatsky and Olcott, with the ideas of Blavatsky as its leading inspiration.

Theosophy, and the system of thought evolved by Blavatsky, is based on the acquisition of occult knowledge, of secret and hidden facts about man and the universe, rather than on seeking religious or mystical experience. It is the path of gaining power through knowledge; the motto of the Society is 'There is no Religion higher than Truth', and it was the nature of the hidden 'Truth' of existence which Blavatsky sought to propound in her writings. She and later Theosophists promoted this 'Truth' as the foundation and synthesis of all religions. At its heart and centre is a single, eternal, boundless, omnipresent and immutable principle, one absolute reality, Parabrahman or Sat (Truth), the impersonal essence from which all else has proceeded. From this Absolute proceed three Logoi, which become the manifested gods. The first Logos is the Father, the impersonal and unmanifested, Ishvara or the Lord, the creator (Vishnu)[sic] and destroyer (Shiva) of the worlds. The second Logos is the Mother, the manifested, Life, the primal duality of spirit and matter, Purusha and Prakriti. The third Logos is the universe, cosmic ideation, intelligence or Mind, the universal world soul. The universe is regarded as eternal, in constant flux and flow, and everything within it, including matter, has its own consciousness and life. At a higher level than matter, individual souls are eternally evolving and reincarnating, being themselves rays or emanations of the universal Over-soul which is

an aspect of the Unknown Root or Parabrahman; and they can ascend through various degrees of intelligence from matter to spirit. The entire cosmos is guided, controlled and animated by an almost endless series of hierarchies of sentient beings, each having its own mission to perform, each either having been or awaiting to become a man. Those on a higher level are increasingly perfected, ego-less and closer to the One, and by coming into contact with them man can raise himself on to their plane or level. Although the universe is eternal, Blavatsky perceived a progressive march towards a higher life, an evolutionary design manipulated and guided by beings and spirits working towards a grand end. At the top of this hierarchy of beings is the first Logos, the Lord of the World, who periodically descends to earth to his home at Shamballa in the Gobi desert where he takes the form of a sixteen-year-old boy. Next in rank below him is the Buddha, whose earlier incarnations include Vyasa the Vedic seer, the Greek god Hermes and Egyptian Thoth, Orpheus son of Apollo, and Zarathustra the founder of Zoroastrianism. Below him is Manu, the progenitor of mankind. Then come the seven Rays, each having its own ruler, Master or Chohan. The Chohan of the first Ray is the Master Morya: he lives in a secret valley in Tibet alongside the Chohan of the second Ray, the Master Khoot Hoomi. It was these two whom Blavatsky claimed had acted as her spiritual guides and directed the founding of the Society. The other five Chohans are the (unnamed) Venetian Master, previously Plotinus in an earlier incarnation; Serapis; Hilarion; Jesus, who later reincarnated as Ramanuja; and Prince Rakoczi of Transylvania. Each Ray has its own characteristics: respectively will, wisdom, intellect, harmony, science, faith and magic; and each in turn has a period of predominance. Below the Chohans are, successively, Adepts—also termed Jivanmuktas (Liberated Souls) and those who have achieved Nirvana, Arhats or Worthy Ones, Initiates, and Probationers. Together, all these form one of the three Lodges of the Great White Brotherhood, which are sited in Luxor (Egypt), the Himalayas, and an undisclosed locality. Continuing with the ever-present groupings of seven, there are seven globes to each of the seven major planets, of which only one is fully material and within our everyday perception; and every life-cycle during this material phase witnesses the emergence of seven Root-Races, each lasting for one Maha Yuga or Great Age. The Root-Races past so far are the Lemurian or Negroid, the Atlantean or Mongolian, and the Aryan; representatives of each race still people the earth, as reincarnating souls need to take birth

in each as often as is required to fully unfold in themselves the qualities characteristic of each. Thereafter they can evolve into the next and higher Race. Man himself has ascended through various levels to reach his present status; having passed through the mineral, vegetable and animal to reach the human, he must yet ascend through the astral, lower mental, higher mental, and spiritual to reach the divine world, successively leaving each level or sheath behind as he progresses further up the hierarchy. Existence on each of these levels corresponds to the existence of the Probationer, Initiate, Arhat, Adept and Chohan.

For Theosophy, the chief way of reaching and contacting these higher planes is magic, which Blavatsky defined as wisdom:

'Magic, as a science, is the knowledge of those principles and of the way by which the omniscience and omnipotence of the spirit and its control over nature's forces may be acquired by the individual while still in the body. Magic, as an art, is the application of this knowledge in practice. Arcane knowledge misapplied is sorcery; beneficially used, true magic or Wisdom.'

One form of contacting the astral is through mediumship and seances. This however is passive, allowing oneself to be used by those forces, while the path of magic involves actively controlling oneself and all lower potencies. It involves knowing the occult properties in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms—the power potencies of rocks and stones, of plants and herbs. In that way man can gain knowledge, power and control over the various levels of existence, and alter the conditions of physical and astral bodies. Besant, in particular, later added Yoga and meditation to magic as means to turn inwards towards the mental body and thereby artificially force the evolution of the astral and mental bodies beyond the normal. The main aim in this was once again the acquisition of knowledge and power, and gaining contact with the Masters who might teach him how to hasten his evolution and rise higher in the spiritual hierarchy.

The above is a greatly simplified summary outline of the main points in Blavatsky's Theosophy. There are innumerable expansions and refinements, and parallels made with Egyptian, Gnostic, Kabbalistic and many other systems of thought. One of Blavatsky's main aims—indeed, a chief aim of Theosophy in general—was to synthesize all of these and show that this teaching was common to all traditions and religions. For:

'There never was nor can there be more than one universal religion, for

there can be but one truth concerning God . . . the unity of God, the immortality of spirit, belief in salvation only through our own works, merit and demerit—these are the principle articles of faith of the wisdom religion—the ground work of Vedaism, Buddhism, Parseeism . . . there never will be a truly philosophic mind, whether of Pagan, Heathen, Jew or Christian, but has followed the same path of thought.'

Theosophy was deemed to be the foundation of all religions, as Besant put it; its doctrines and beliefs were scattered everywhere, through all times, in all places and religions, but its revival and systematization into a coherent and interrelated body of doctrines was the achievement of the Theosophical Society.

The formulation of Theosophy as universal religion was destined to have a widespread and lasting effect, not least on subsequent Indian religious thinkers and teachers. The ideas of universal religion and of the oneness of religions, which characterizes much of twentieth century religious thought, owes much to Blavatsky's attempted synthesis, even though many would probably be reluctant to acknowledge such an esoteric spiritualist as their source. Even her detailed schema of the hierarchies of existence has had a profound effect, not least on such thinkers as Aurobindo. The path of Theosophy, spiritualism and magic is a far cry from the path of religious and mystical experience sought after by most Gurus and disciples, Yet such experience is generally expressed in terms of some idealistic, philosophical or theological framework—particularly, in the case of many twentieth century Gurus, Vedanta—and it is the Guru who accepts and adopts this framework and interprets the experience in terms of it. What Blavatsky and Theosophy achieved was to lay the foundations of a framework which made Indian philosophical and religious thought both accessible and acceptable to the West as but one aspect of the universal truth common to all religions. Therein they opened the way for countless searchers after truth to seek in Hinduism and other Eastern religions what they felt had been denied them in Christianity yet what was promised them by the Gurus—namely direct personal experience of God or truth. Blavatsky and the Theosophists' approach of seeking to attain knowledge and power was in this respect of less importance than their claim to have discovered the truth of all religions manifested in Oriental religions. For it was this claim which many Westerners now sought to test, and which the Gurus in turn sought to demonstrate.

CHAPTER IV

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission

Calcutta was only a collection of small villages when, around 1690, the British in the form of Job Charnock decided to create from it the headquarters of their rule in India. Throughout the next two centuries it flourished, until in 1911, the seat of the Empire was shifted to Delhi. Since then Calcutta has been falling back on its past, struggling to find an identity in the present, even being robbed of much of its former livelihood as a jute producer and exporter following the independence of the jute-producing area of East Pakistan, later Bangladesh. Calcutta's original name, Kali-Kata, testifies to the particular prevalence among its native Bengalis of the worship of Kali, the violent and bloodthirsty wife of Shiva, destroyer of demons and of evil, who—legend has it—once got so carried away with her slaughter that she would have destroyed the world had not Shiva prostrated himself at her feet and thereby succeeded in bringing to a halt her dance of death. Calcutta even today reverberates to the spirit of Kali: a witness that life must encompass death, peace must coalesce with violence, that good cannot thrive unless there is an evil for it to overcome.

At a slight remove from the heart of this teeming and throbbing city lie the two administrative headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission: Belur Math with its large temple and monastic complex to the north, and the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in the relatively sedate southern suburb of Ballygunge. The Ramakrishna Mission was essentially the creation not of Ramakrishna himself but of his chief disciple, Vivekananda. From large monastic-like buildings is ordered the administration of the Ramakrishna movement around the world, as well as the conduct of the daily lecture programmes always guaranteed to attract sizeable audiences. Across the city, as indeed elsewhere in cities throughout India and abroad, are spread other centres, schools and

hospitals, all testifying to the highly organized nature of the Ramakrishna Mission today. In the northern part of the city, close to Belur Math, stands the temple of Dakshineshwar, made famous through the residence there of Ramakrishna himself, once its resident priest. Today it is both a pilgrimage centre and a standard halt on tourist itineraries.

One wonders what Ramakrishna himself would have made of this highly organized society that has grown up in his name. He was born on 18 February 1836 in the village of Kamarpukur, some sixty miles north-west of Calcutta. His parents, Khudiram Chatterjee and Chandra Devi, were married in 1799 and already had two sons, Ramkumar (born 1805) and Rameshwar (born 1826), and a daughter Katyayani (born 1810). They were a Brahmin family who in 1814 had been evicted from their nearby ancestral village of Dereypore when Khudiram had refused to bear false witness against a neighbour at the request of the village landlord, and who then settled in Kamarpukur—a moderately wealthy village on the pilgrimage route to the Jagannath temple at Puri. Here Khudiram farmed half an acre of fertile land and came to be respected by his new neighbours as a pious and spiritual man, a devotee of the god Vishnu. Khudiram went on a number of long pilgrimages, leaving the running of the household in the hands of his eldest son, Ramkumar. It was after returning from one of these journeys, on which he had had a vision that Vishnu would be born as his son, that Chandra Devi conceived and gave birth to their third son, Gadadhar, later to be known as Ramakrishna.

Gadadhar was a healthy, lively and restless boy, often running off to play by himself around the village and nearby fields. He had a prodigious memory, and could soon recite almost verbatim the stories and myths of Hindu tradition which he heard both at home and from the wandering ascetics and pilgrims who passed through Kamarpukur. His favourite hobbies were moulding and painting images of the various gods and goddesses which he learnt from the local potters. His father died when Gadadhar was only seven, and this seemingly had a profound effect in that Gadadhar was increasingly drawn towards the lifestyle of the passing pilgrims and sadhus, and would listen avidly and enrapt to the stories of gods and saints they would tell. He would also at times so lose himself in contemplation that his family and friends would become worried at his periodic lapses of concentration and attention. There was one occasion when he was persuaded to play the role of Shiva in a religious performance, and so identified himself with the role—and so totally

convinced the audience—that he entered a trance-like state, the play had to be stopped, and it took until the following morning before Gadadhar reverted to his normal self. Meanwhile his elder brother, Ramkumar—who was some thirty years older than Gadadhar—moved to Calcutta to boost the family income and opened a Sanskrit school. When Gadadhar was sixteen, Ramkumar summoned him to Calcutta with the intention that he would become a scholar and teacher. Gadadhar, however, decided otherwise. Starting in Calcutta in his Brahmin role as priest to a number of Calcutta families, he devoted himself to worship, spending hours decorating the gods' images and singing hymns and devotional songs, and paying scant attention to studies. Ramkumar could do nothing to dissuade him from this, and instead persuaded him to assist him as priest at a new temple dedicated to the goddess Kali, which had been constructed in 1855 under the patronage of a wealthy Shudra woman called Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law, Mathura Mohan, at Dakshineshwar, then a village four miles north of Calcutta. Gadadhar was assisted in this task by a boyhood friend and distant nephew called Hriday; and the following year, when Ramkumar died, Gadadhar became in charge of the Kali temple.

From this point on Gadadhar became increasingly and ardently devoted to the worship of Kali. When he was not performing ceremonies in the temple he would be in meditation on Kali, yearning for a vision of the Mother of the universe, often naked in a nearby burial ground and taking neither food nor sleep. Sometimes he would bang his face repeatedly on the ground and weep bitterly and uncontrollably, so that his assistant Hriday began to doubt Gadadhar's sanity. It was not long before Gadadhar began to have visions of the Divine Mother standing before him, smiling, consoling and instructing him. Sometimes, while performing worship, he would fall silent or collapse overcome by emotion; sometimes he would imitate Hanuman the monkey-god, the symbol of devotion of servant towards master, and would scamper around the temple on all fours. The temple authorities, convinced by now that he was insane, put another priest—Haladhari—in charge of the temple; Gadadhar returned to Kamarpukur, where at twenty-three years old, his mother arranged for him to marry a young, five-year-old girl named Saradamani. The marriage, though it took place, was never consummated; and it failed to have his mother's desired effect in making him less other-worldly, since he looked upon his new bride as an incarnation of the divine Mother and

eventually came literally to worship her as such.

After a year-and-a-half Gadadhar returned to the Kali temple at Dakshineshwar, where his previous 'goddess-intoxicated' state immediately returned with intensified force. Going without sleep or food for days on end, Gadadhar would be oblivious to the birds that perched on him while he was meditating, and was subject to uncontrollable bouts of weeping and laughing. He was soon joined at the temple by a Brahmin woman ascetic, and there grew between them the relationship of mother and child. She looked upon him as the baby Krishna, and was convinced that he was an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu—a claim which several pandits also accepted. Gadadhar came to accept the Brahmin woman as his Guru, and under her guidance he learnt and performed first tantric disciplines to awaken and realize Shakti or the power of the divine Mother, and then Bhakti or loving worship of devotional Vaishnavism involving the emotional yearning of the lover for the beloved. Then in 1864 there came to Dakshineshwar a naked wandering Sadhu called Tota Puri, who initiated Gadadhar into Non-Dualistic Vedanta philosophy; under his guidance Gadadhar became a sannyasin, totally renouncing the world, accepting Brahman as the only reality of existence. Gadadhar came to identify Brahman with the divine Mother, Kali; and he saw the combination of both as a Reality which is both active, creating and destroying, as well as passive and impersonal, both of these being but different aspects of a single Truth or Reality. It was at some point around this time that Gadadhar was given and adopted the name Ramakrishna by which he was subsequently known—whether by Tota Puri or by Mathura Mohan is uncertain.

This effectively completed Gadadhar's—or rather Ramakrishna's—period of searching. The devotee and aspirant became the Master, and Ramakrishna was now convinced that the gods of different paths and religions were but different aspects of one Reality, and that all other religions, by different paths, led to the same goal and Reality. He came to declare that Jesus, Allah and Buddha were all incarnations or aspects of one God and Reality, with whom he had realized his own identity.

'A lake has several Ghats (bathing places). At one the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it *jal*; at another the Muslims take water in leather bags and call it *pani*; at a third the Christians call it "water". Can we imagine that it is not *jal*, but only *pani* or "water"? How ridiculous! The substance is one under different names, and everyone is seeking the same

substance; only climate, temperament and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path.'

Ramakrishna henceforth went on several pilgrimages across north India; he also attracted the attention of leaders and followers of both the Brahmo and Arya Samaj, movements attempting in different ways to revive and universalize the appeal of Hinduism both within and beyond India. From around 1879 he also attracted a number of disciples whom he initiated as monks and taught his own syncretistic way of thought and practice. Chief among these was a young eighteen-year-old Bengali college student of Law, Narendranath Dutta, who joined him in 1881 and soon became his right-hand man, acknowledged from 1884 as the leading disciple and as Ramakrishna's spiritual heir. After some months of illness from throat cancer, Ramakrishna died on 15 August 1886.

For the next two years after Ramakrishna's death Narendra organized the disciples into a monastic brotherhood based at Barranagore. Then from 1888 he set out on a series of wanderings around India, first across the north and later to the south as far as Kanyakumari. It was on his southern wanderings in 1891–92 that the Raja of Khetri, who became his greatest patron, persuaded him to take the name Swami Vivekananda. It was also on these wanderings that Vivekananda's fame grew as a religious teacher and expounder of the teachings of Ramakrishna. Determined to spread the teachings more widely, and funded by the Raja of Khetri, Vivekananda in 1893 set sail via the Far East to America, where in September of that year he gave a memorable address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago which rocketed both him and the teachings into international notice and acclaim. There followed a lecture-tour of America and several visits to England and other parts of Europe, as a result of which centres were established to proclaim and expound the teachings of Ramakrishna. Vivekananda then returned to India in 1897, where later that same year he formally set up the Ramakrishna Mission Association with the basic aim of establishing fellowship among the followers of different religions as forms only of one underlying Eternal Religion, as taught by Ramakrishna. This organization was later to evolve in 1909 into the present Ramakrishna Mission, with temples and centres spread throughout India and abroad. The village of Belur became in 1898 the site for the Mission's main temple and monastic complex, and in 1899 the permanent headquarters of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Soon there came to it a number of Western as well as Indian disciples: not least

Miss Margaret Noble, a school teacher from Wimbledon in England, who as Sister Nivedita set about to found model institutions for the education of Indian women. Vivekananda paid one further visit to the West in 1899–1900; not long after he died of heart failure at Belur Math in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Though Master and Disciple had passed away, the organization was now well-established; Vivekananda was succeeded as head of the Ramakrishna Mission by an able administrator, Brahmananda, who guided the Mission's development over the next twenty-one years into an influential India-based international movement spreading the teachings and message of Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna would probably have remained a revered and respected teacher, one among many, had it not been for the missionary zeal of his young disciple Vivekananda in firstly forming his followers into a movement, and secondly promoting his teachings both within, and more especially, beyond India. Ramakrishna himself never wrote nor lectured, but gave instructions in the style of informal conversations which were recorded by his disciples. His teachings centred above all on a devotional approach towards the divine Reality within man, which he saw as being both personal and impersonal, approachable equally through the paths of knowledge and love; a combination of Bhakti, Tantra and Advaita approaches, which he expanded to encompass Christianity and Islam. He seems to have made no in-depth study or to have had any deep knowledge of the latter. But at that time with his almost unique proclamation that the goal of all religions was identical, Ramakrishna stands apart from nearly all other religious teachers of his time, and it was his universal vision of the harmony of all religions—ably promoted and expounded by Vivekananda—which attracted many Western thinkers to his teachings, such as the academics Max Mueller and Paul Deusson and the writers Romain Rolland and Christopher Isherwood. Vivekananda was more a social reformer than a visionary or mystic, and sought to create 'a European society with India's religion'. Vigorously proclaiming the gospel of Ramakrishna, often according to his own interpretation, he laid the foundations for the Ramakrishna Mission to develop from a religious fraternity into a world-wide missionary organization: preaching a kind of Hindu universalism which characterizes it to the present day, with greater emphasis on Advaita Vedanta than on either Bhakti or Tantra. It was also under Vivekananda's guidance that the movement entered the fields of education and social action, with its provision of hospitals and

dispensaries, schools, libraries and lecture-halls. Yet it seems this is a far cry from Ramakrishna's approach; for Ramakrishna specifically criticized concentration on this type of activity for all but the most enlightened:

'Do you talk of social reform? Well, you may do so after realizing God. Remember, the rishis of old gave up the world in order to realize God. This is the one thing needful. All other things shall be added to you, if indeed you care to have them. First see God, and then talk of lectures and social reform.'

Like many institutions founded on the inspiration of an individual, the Ramakrishna Mission—largely under Vivekananda's guidance—seems to have got things backwards in many respects, and does seem to have subordinated the mystical vision and emphasis on self-realization given by its founder to more social and worldly aims—however laudable in themselves these might be.

It was above all the spirit of universalism proclaimed by Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions which caught the imagination of his Western audience—and the spirit of Hindu universalism which caught that of his Indian listeners. The carefully-chosen words from the Upanishads and the *Gita*—of all streams merging their waters in the one sea, and of all paths leading in the end to one God—was exactly what his Western audience, bewildered by Christian sectarianism and bigotry and by the as yet little-understood religions of the East, wanted to hear. Reassuring were his words that a Christian did not have to become a Hindu (or a Hindu become a Christian) in order to realize this unity of goal; appealing was his proclamation that the universal religion would be the sum total of all existing religions, with a place for all divergent views, beliefs and practices. So appealing, indeed, that this proclamation has remained and been accepted, sometimes consciously but more often unconsciously, by nearly all contemporary Indian Gurus, religious teachers and laymen alike, as well as by a great many religious thinkers beyond India.

CHAPTER V

Ramana Maharshi

The small town of Thiruvannamalai rests in the shadow of the great Arunachala mountain in the heart of Tamil Nadu in South India. It has grown up as a cross-roads on the routes between Madras in the north to Cape Comorin in the south, from Bangalore in the west to Pondicherry in the east. The Arunachala mountain has for centuries past been regarded as a sacred abode of the god Shiva, even as an incarnation of him; Thiruvannamalai's main claim to fame today remains as a pilgrimage centre which has its focus both in the mountain itself and in the large and important temple which nestles at its feet and seems almost to try and scale its lower slopes—whether through the design of its architect or through the geographical layout of its surroundings, remains uncertain.

On the outskirts of the town, some three kilometres from the temple which as much as anywhere else forms its centre, stands the ashram of Ramana Maharshi or 'Ramana the great sage.' Straight ahead of the visitor, across a loosely-gravelled open courtyard, is the ashram's shrine to the sage and adjacent temple to Shiva, where several times a day young boy-students study and chant excerpts from the Vedic hymns preserving some of the original Vedic metres in their song. The ashram contains rooms for both long-term residents and short-term visitors; the residents, besides a handful of mainly South Indian devotees, include two British scholar-devotees who have both been living at the ashram for the past decade or so—one, David Godman, has published several books which are primarily extracts from the works of Ramana. The ashram has an air of peace and quiet, little disturbed either by the steady stream of visitors throughout the day or by the raucous noise of traffic which thunders past its main gate.

Ramana Maharshi was born on 30 December 1879 in the village of Tiruchuzhi near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. He was the second of three sons born to his parents Sundaram Aiyar and Alagammal; his father used to

plead cases before the local magistrate, and the family do not seem to have been particularly religiously-oriented, although both a brother and an uncle of Sundaram renounced the world and became sannyasins. Venkataraman, as he was called then, showed little interest in his school studies in Dindigul and later Madurai; and equally little inclination towards worship or religious pursuits, until early in 1896 he came across a Tamil religious text called *Periapuranam* giving an account of the lives and experiences of Tamil saints. Later that same year, when he was sixteen years old, there occurred an experience which was to totally change the course of his life. It is best described in his own words:

> It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day I was sitting alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual health. I seldom had any illness. There was nothing wrong with my health. But a sudden and violent fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die. Why I should have felt so cannot now be explained by anything felt in my body. No could I explain it to myself then. I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well-grounded. I felt 'I was going to die', and at once began thinking out what I should do. It did not occur to me to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there. The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective or 'introverted'. I said to myself mentally, without actually uttering the words—'Now death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though *rigor mortis* had set in. I imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to my investigation, I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together so that no sound could escape. So that neither the word 'I' nor any other word could be uttered. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'This body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am 'I' dead? Is the body 'I'? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from the body. So 'I' am the spirit, transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be

touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit.' All this was not a mere intellectual process, but flashed through me as living truth, something which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that 'I'. From that time forwards the 'I' or my 'self' focussed attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and forever. Absorption in the self has continued unbroken from that moment right up to this time.

This experience caused a dramatic change in Ramana's outlook and behaviour. He lost all interest in his family and his studies, and would sit alone by himself in meditation on his 'self'. He began to go almost daily to the Madurai Meenakshi temple, sometimes sobbing with emotion; and in the face of rebukes by both relatives and teachers, on 29 August 1896 the young Venkataraman left home and travelled to Thiruvannamalai, renowned for its temple dedicated to Arunachaleshvara, 'the Lord of Arunachala' (Shiva). There, first in the temple itself, then at a shrine outside the town and later in caves on the hillside, he would sit and meditate for hours on end, oblivious to the ants and insects that bit him, and attracting a steady stream of would-be devotees. One of his earliest disciples, A. Ganapati Shastri, gave him the title 'Bhagwan Shri Ramana Maharshi' (Lord Ramana the great sage) in 1907, and this title stuck with him for the rest of his life. For years Ramana adopted a vow of silence; later, when he did speak, he would do so only on rare occasions and would reply only to those questions he chose to answer. His mother and younger brother eventually came to live alongside him; and when his mother died in 1922, the site of her grave, a short distance from the centre of Thiruvannamalai and on the lower slopes of Arunachala, became the site of the new ashram. The ashram rapidly became a focus of attraction not only for devotees from all over India but for visitors from around the world, particularly following the publication in 1934 of Paul Brunton's book, *A Search in Secret India*, about his conversations with, and impressions of Ramana. Ramana never left India—indeed, from the time he arrived at Thiruvannamalai he never ventured more than two miles from it; and he died of cancer on 14 April 1950.

Ramana's teachings are based thoroughly on Advaita or Non-Dual Vedanta. The Self, Brahman and God are all terms used by him to describe

a single, unitary ultimate reality underlying both the universe and the individual. The individual Self *is* God without distinction; it is only man's ignorance which prevents him from perceiving this, and knowledge of his true nature brings with it the destruction of this veil of ignorance and the awareness of his identity with the Real. Reality lies beyond names and forms, beyond the physical world which has no abiding reality; it is approached through silent awareness, and its realization is perfect bliss as all distinctions disappear, all sense of individuality goes as one merges with the All which is God. Parallel to the path of his own enlightenment, Ramana's main method which he adopted for would-be aspirants was to ask the question, 'Who am I?'; for it is only ignorance of the real nature of the self which separates man from God, and removal of that ignorance through constant self-questioning and delving through thought into the nature of that self brings with it the individual's realization of his own Godhead, his unlimited nature as all-pervading Brahman. Destroy those false ideas about the individual self, and all that is left is pure awareness of the Self.

'There is no goal to be reached, there is nothing to be attained. You are the Self. You exist always. Nothing more can be predicated of the Self than that it exists. Seeing God or the Self is only being the Self or Yourself. You, being the Self, want to know how to attain the Self. All that is required of you is to give up the thought that you are this body and to give up all thoughts of the external things or the not-Self. Remove the ego and ignorance is gone. Look for it, the ego vanishes and the real Self remains. When you try to trace the ego, you find the ego does not exist at all, and neither does this creation that you see.'

Once this awareness is there, the Self-realized person sees only the Self in all things; outward appearances, the body, the world are there but have no substantive reality to them. The source of unreality, of the 'I' thought, arises in and through the mind; by analysing the mind and its thoughts, through rigorous self-enquiry, the individual comes to perceive the unreality of the ego and the 'I' thought comes to be replaced with an awareness of the 'non-I' within. This constant self-questioning is not something for which one needs to renounce the world and become an ascetic in the forests; it is rather something that should be practised at all times, thereby gradually shedding the various layers of false individuality. Ramana denied neither the existence nor the worship of God. For the latter, he advocated being constantly aware of who it was in relationship

with God, and eventually will dawn the realization that the 'I' worshipping God is unreal, and that the Self is none other than God. For some he also advocated total self-surrender to God: in this way negation or denial of the individual self would also lead to the realization of God as one's real Self. In both cases he emphasized, however, that the idea of 'relationship' with God was ultimately an illusory one, since there was no real distinction between worshipper and worshipped. He was also not in favour of elaborate forms of meditation, the practice of physical Yoga exercises or of Pranayama (control of breathing), or the mindless repetition of mantras or prayers. These could still the mind and prepare the ground for some, but full awareness could only come about through rigorous self-inquiry, through perceiving and casting off the ego or individual self and thereby arriving at the Self, the only reality. Once that is reached, then death and rebirth and the effects of Karma have no hold over the person who is fully aware of his divinity; for these only apply to the body, to the unreal, and the enlightened person has gone beyond that and lives solely in the real, in Brahman, in God.

Full realization and awareness can only come about, in Ramana's teaching, through a Guru. The Guru is himself fully aware, is one with his Self, with God—he is indeed God or the Self. Guru, God and Self are identical: the Guru is God in human form, and is the innermost Self of the seeker. So to become one with one's Self is to become one with both God and the Guru. Since ignorance of the Self is so ingrained in man, the Guru is necessary to help the seeker remove his own ignorance; and if the seeker is striving to achieve this, the Guru's grace and help will contribute to the seeker's efforts.

'The Guru is both external and internal. From the exterior he gives a push to the mind to turn it inwards. From the interior he pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in the quietening of the mind. This is Guru's grace. The Guru does not bring about Self-realization. He simply removes the obstacles to it. The Self is always realized. So long as you seek Self-realization the Guru is necessary. So long as duality persists in you the Guru is necessary. You are not the body, nor is the Guru. You are the Self and so is the Guru. This knowledge is gained by what you call Self-realization. You should not at any time go against the words of the Guru. The words of the sages assure you that if one does a wrong to God, it can be rectified by the Guru, but that wrong done to a Guru cannot be rectified even by God. Guru is not the physical form. So the contact will

remain even after the physical form of the Guru vanishes. One can go to another Guru after one's Guru passes way, but all Gurus are one and none of them are the form you see.'

At this point Ramana runs into a slight difficulty, because he himself never had a human Guru. When asked about this, he would reiterate that a Guru is absolutely necessary, but add that a Guru need not be in human form; since the Guru is God or the Self, God when prayed to will appear in some human or non-human form to guide the seeker. Nevertheless, for all but the most enlightened, Ramana teaches that a human Guru is required.

Ramana was a sound and logical exponent of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta. For him, the Self alone is real, beyond the phenomenal world of appearances; and the Self *is* God, with no element of separation or duality. The paths of Karma (Action) and Bhakti (Devotion) are strongly subordinated to that of Jnana (Knowledge), and Self-realization is achieved through the destruction of all sense of ego by persistent self-inquiry to discover the real nature of one's Self. Ramana, perhaps wisely, on the whole refrained from commenting on other religions. He would certainly take from them what was useful to his own message, such as the expression 'I am that I am' from the Bible, but beyond that would not be drawn to criticize or condone other teachings or teachers. He did not go out of his way to attract followers, knowing from the earliest days of his withdrawal from the world that they would come to him. He accepted the traditional elevated role of the Guru, despite not having had one himself; and he emphasized that renunciation of the world was not necessary—even though he himself had renounced it totally, spent years in strict ascetic performances, and up to his death he possessed only a loincloth, a staff and a water-pot. Further contradictions abound in what he said and taught, particularly about the nature of God; and while many of these were no doubt due to adopting different teachings in talking to people at different levels of awareness, it is nonetheless clear that he accepted the qualified reality of the Hindu gods and at least sanctioned the installation of their images in the ashram temple. His evidently firm belief in reincarnation—for all but Self-realized like himself—extended to a cow he named Lakshmi, which lived in the ashram for many years and was regarded by Ramana as a reincarnation of an old woman who used to live on the Arunachala mountain and would often feed him in his early days. He himself would feed the cow in the dining hall alongside

devotees and visitors, and he would brook no criticisms when the cow dirtied the hall with excreta or trampled the vegetable garden. When Lakshmi died in 1948, Ramana had her buried in the ashram compound, where her grave remains with an inscription describing her as a liberated soul. All of these apparent illogicalities and practices no doubt had the effect of increasing his own status and stature, and of extending the appeal of his teachings. For, to the devotee, paradoxically, the more contradictions that abound, the greater must be the depths of truth that lie hidden behind them. Yet Ramana's teachings, despite certain eccentric overlays, are relatively straightforward and purist Advaita. Just as Ramana himself had no Guru, so too none has arisen to take over the mantle of Guru-hood from him; his teachings nevertheless continue to have a widespread appeal both within and beyond India.

CHAPTER VI

Chinmayananda

Bombay—the commercial heart of India, home of the prolific Hindi film industry, the busiest of all Indian cities, a chaotic urban sprawl containing India's fastest-growing slum population. Not at first sight an obvious choice for setting up a religious commune dedicated to silent meditation and self-realization. Yet it is close to the heart of this city that Chinmayananda has set up the headquarters of his 'Chinmaya Mission', an ashram where his followers can seek to gain enlightenment and from which they can branch out to spread the Chinmaya message to Bombay and to the world. The ashram is built on a hillside in a green and leafy oasis on the shores of Lake Powai, a few kilometres east of the noise and dirt of the commercial centre and a short bus or taxi ride from the suburban railway stations of Andheri and Kanjur Marg which daily convey more than a million passengers and disgorge them at the central stations of Churchgate and Victoria Terminus.

The ashram's focal point, positioned on a hillock to the left of the entrance, is an airy and spacious temple dedicated to Shiva as the principal deity. Its peaceful and timeless atmosphere contrasts starkly with the chaos of the city all around, and makes it a popular destination and refuge—particularly at weekends—for many seeking to escape the pressures of their everyday lives. An open-air shrine to Chinmayananda's Guru, Tapovan, and a single-storey office complex housing primarily a bookshop selling Chinmayananda's many published works, complete the area open to the visitor; beyond, set amidst the tree-covered hillside, lie the meditation hall and residential blocks used by those, from India and abroad, who come to absorb the Chinmaya message and take part in the various meditation courses being run at the ashram.

There is no biography yet written of Swami Chinmayananda; details of his early life are scanty and culled from what he or his followers are willing to divulge. The apparent reluctance to do so is based on the, in

many respects laudable, aim to focus his followers' attention not on the man but on the teaching, the path and the follower—on the premise that the Guru is there not to explain himself but to help the follower explain, explore and realize *himself*. In this respect, as in others, Chinmayananda seeks to tread the path of the Upanishadic rishis and Gurus before him, and he follows very closely in the tradition of the Upanishads and of the Advaita philosophy of Shankara.

Born in 1915, Chinmayananda was educated first in Cochin and then in Madras, from where he graduated before doing a Master's degree in literature at Lucknow University. He worked for a short while as a freelance journalist; but then, deciding to devote himself fully to the path of self-realization, he went to the ashram of Swami Shivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, in Rishikesh where he stayed for a number of years imbibing all that the Swami could teach him about Vedanta. However he remained unfulfilled by Shivananda's teachings, and at Shivananda's suggestion he sought out another teacher, Swami Tapovan Maharaj, who was also originally from Kerala but now resided high in the Himalayas, at Uttarkashi. There he remained for around seven years, accepting Tapovan as his Guru and studying and meditating under his guidance. An interesting insight into the Chinmayananda of the period can be seen in his diary of a trek he made in the summer of 1948 to several traditional Hindu pilgrimage centres in the Himalayas, now published as *My Trek through Uttarkhand*. From this it is clear that even at that stage Chinmayanada still had some way to go on his path to self-realization. This is also evident from the autobiography of his Guru Tapovan, *Iswara Darshan*, written in 1948, in which Tapovan refers to a number of his disciples but makes no mention of Chinmayananda. Nonetheless by 1951 Chinmayananda judged himself sufficiently enlightened to descend from the Himalayan heights and start his proclaimed mission of teaching and preaching to the masses: a mission which has continued virtually unabated up to the present day. Chinmayananda is almost constantly on the move, giving discourses and holding meditation camps both throughout India and abroad, particularly in the United States where he has been a frequent visitor to numerous university campuses. He first came to Bombay in 1957, and thereafter decided to set up his headquarters near the shores of Powai Lake in the northern part of Bombay. This centre—called Sandeepany Sadhanlaya—was established in 1963, and has been followed by other centres, ashrams, schools and a hospital in various parts

of India, together with one further centre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Bombay centre functions as an ashram, teaching centre and hub of the Chinmaya Mission or movement, where since the late 1970s groups of followers from both India and abroad have undergone a two-and-a-half year training course before being sent out again to spread the message. These courses are often conducted by Chinmayananda's two leading disciples, Tejomayananda and Purushottamananda; but Chinmayananda himself, despite having undergone open-heart surgery in the States in 1981, continues with seemingly unabated energy to expound and spread the teachings he has espoused.

Chinmayananda is perhaps first and foremost a Sanskrit pandit and commentator on Hindu scriptures. Here he follows in the great tradition of teachers and Gurus before him: like Shankara and Ramanuja, he expounds the scriptures verse by verse, first explaining the literal meaning of the Sanskrit words and then interpreting the meaning and import of the verse against a wider background of both Hindu philosophy and Western thought. In this he is a master of interpreting the meaning in terms readily understandable to his students and listeners. This method forms much of the content of his discourses; he has also written many books of commentaries on such works as the Upanishads, the *Bhagavadgita*, the Puranas and the works of Shankara. Chinmayananda does not claim to expound any personal theories or new techniques, but rather to give 'logical expositions in a language understandable to the modern, educated man'. The level and approach of his teaching varies according to his audience, and ranges from fairly naïve and basic exhortations towards leading a good life through to thorough-going expositions of rigid Shankara Advaita philosophy. As for the Upanishadic sages, the path for Chinmayananda starts with the disciple seeking out a Guru. He explains the need for this in the simile of a car-owner whose car breaks down: he himself knows little of what is wrong with the engine, but if he has a good chauffeur-mechanic with him such problems can be easily overcome. The Guru must be both a man of self-experience and one who has a heart full of kindness and sympathy for all types of seekers, so that he can go down to the level of the disciple and assist him in his own ascent towards self-realization. The disciple-student in turn must be intellectually capable of understanding the Guru, have an argumentative spirit of inquiry, an ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal, a desire for truth and liberation and detachment from the unreal in order to walk

this path of self-knowledge. Once the disciple has found his Guru, there follows a long and gradual process of education and enlightenment of the disciple; the Guru guides him through his reading of the scriptures, explaining their meaning, leading him ultimately through a process of intellectual understanding of the real nature of himself and the world to the Vedantic realization that there is ultimately no separation or distinction between the real essence of the self and the world around—to the realization that there is but one reality underlying and pervading the whole of existence, and that reality is within himself. Chinmayananda is scathing in his criticism of Gurus who offer 'instant enlightenment':

> The Guru-Grace trick had been a very lucrative profession in our country in recent years. The credulous public demanding cheap methods for the highest gains becomes an easy prey for the self-appointed Gurus. Without any investment, if a young man wants income and quick gains, there can be no better way than to become one of those unscrupulous Gurus. The 'truth' has fallen to such depths that now there are Gurus available who can, through the nation's postal service, send to their distant disciples products of Grace and Glory of curative strength, failure-proof talismans, child-bearing seeds or even products of God's own vermilion Glory. All these, mind you at a reasonable rate quoted ex-godown! . . . a true Teacher of inner vision and perfect life cannot, by any logic, come to dispense a greater share of his Grace on people of his choice nor can he withhold his Grace from some others. In fact the distribution of Grace is not controlled by the Guru but depends upon the capacity of the recipient.

For Chinmayananda there are no easy short-cuts along the path towards self-realization. The ability to distinguish between the Real and the unreal, to control mind and body, to achieve renunciation and detachment from the unreal, and to become established in Brahman as the Real is one which can only come about gradually, through knowledge gained by constant study and reflection. Only in this way can the disciple gain liberation, release, self-knowledge and self-realization.

As for the Guru, his role *vis-à-vis* the disciple is basically functional: he is there as an external aid and prop to guide the disciple and help him along the path towards self-knowledge and enlightenment. To the

disciple, the Guru is the embodiment of the goal: he is nothing but pure consciousness, Absolute Bliss and Eternal Wisdom. Gradually, as the disciple approaches closer to the goal, he comes to be guided more and more by the pure and enlightened intellect within him, until finally, with the dawning of self-knowledge comes the realization that the real Guru is none other than that pure intellect within: the guiding light of Soul, Atman, Brahman embodied also in his earthly Guru. Once that stage is achieved, the disciple is in turn ready to act as a Guru to others on the path. Yet he needs more than enlightenment to do so successfully, for as Chinmayananda points out, 'Some of the Master men of realization in the Himalayas, noted and recognized for their realization, admired and worshipped for their perfections, prostrated and served for their divinity, are incapacitated to be a Guru to a disciple, since they have no medium with which to express their deep and subjective experiences. They stammer forth some broken words of endless import which, as it were, fizzle out and evaporate away even before they escape their lips. Or, if at all some words fall out, they convey no sense to the eager hearer. Often such Masters guide us through their Presence, their ways and their actions, and physically they take to an unbroken vow of silence.' In short, one who has realized Brahman, unless he is also well-versed in the sacred scriptures, cannot be a full teacher to all students.

Chinmayananda is, then, at base a thorough-going Advaita Vedantin following the teachings and path first set out in the Upanishads. However, like Shankara before him, he also emphasizes the role and importance of Bhakti, devotion:

> Vedanta is no annihilator of Bhakti. No Bhakta can be a true one unless he be a Vedantin; and no Vedantin is perfect unless he be a lover of the Lord. Philosophy without love is madness; love without philosophy is superstition.

Shankara was insistent that Bhakti was supreme as an instrument and condition necessary on the path to liberation; he defined Bhakti as a constant and consistent effort at raising the ego-centre from the welter of its false values to the memory and dignity of Self-hood. It is, in a sense, a joyous outpouring of love upon the realization of the One that lies within oneself, of the Divine within oneself. Thus Chinmayananda interprets the *Bhagavadgita,* like other Advaitins, as an Advaita text in which Krishna is a symbol of the Self, the supreme Brahman; and almost despite what

the *Gita* actually says, Chinmayananda's interpretation of the *Gita* denies any ultimate separation between the soul and God, any element of differentiation between 'Krishna' and Brahman. Thus on *Gita* 10.8 (quoted in Chapter One) he comments that: 'Love or devotion is measured by the capacity of the lover to identify himself with the beloved. In short love is fulfilled when the identification is complete and when the devotee is capable of experiencing in himself that he is none other than the Infinite Self which, functioning through the Cosmic-mind, plays the part of Ishwara the Creator.' Like others before him, Chinmayananda seeks to have the best of both worlds. He argues on the one hand that the various paths of devotion, knowledge and action 'are neither contradictory nor antagonistic to each other, but they all run converging to one and the same goal.' Then there comes a subtle shift in the argument, when he asserts that each path is set out for different types and approaches of people: thus the more emotional will follow the path of devotion, the intellectual will follow the path of knowledge and so forth. The third stage of the argument, however, then sets these paths in a hierarchy, in which the path of knowledge is (predictably) supreme:

'The controversy between devotion and knowledge is perfectly proved to be empty and hollow . . . these two are not contradictory, but they are complementary and are to be practised in a serial. Devotion to a Personal God with form and name is as much important for the higher meditation, since continuous and intense meditation upon the formless Reality is necessary for the greater realization of the Self . . . we will be able to get over the sorrows of death because of our faith and devotion to the Lord with a form, while our evolution would be fulfilled completely as a result of our higher meditations upon the formless Reality.'

Chinmayananda is fond of quoting the reply given by Hanuman, the monkey-god who is taken as the paradigm of loving devotion to his Lord Rama (Vishnu), when asked to describe his relationship with Rama: 'O Lord, when I am steeped in my body-consciousness, I am your slave; when I identify myself with the mind and intellect, I am part of you; and when I am in my true form as Soul, I am yourself!' This illustrates, says Chinmayananda, that our relationship with the Absolute can be explained in three different ways according to our state of self-consciousness; yet in the highest state there is no separation between the individual self and God, both constitute One Perfect Whole. Herein lies an undoubted element of intellectual dishonesty, an element by no means limited to

Chinmayananda but common to large numbers of Indian religious thinkers over the last 150 years, which was especially promoted by Ramakrishna's disciple Vivekananda. Its chief feature lies in the vague and nebulous claim that 'All religions are one', or that 'All religions aspire to the same goal'. For a Vedantin like Chinmayananda, this is true to the extent that the goal is Advaita, wherein there is ultimately no separation between man and God; and it is true to the extent that worship of God or devotion plays an inferior role on the path towards this goal. Commenting on *Gita* 6.30 (given in Chapter One) Chinmaya says:

'In no clearer term can we more exhaustively describe the unadulterated Truth of the essential divinity in man. Lord Krishna, here, is in no way trying to conceal his meaning that a meditator when he has fulfilled the process of detachment from the not-Self, himself becomes the Eternal and the Infinite . . . the intimate experience of the long hierarchy of Gurus in India and the mystic saints all over the world have endorsed this unbelievably plain truth that, in essence, the Self in an individual is the Self everywhere.' One of Chinmayananda's leading followers has even argued that, since Islam proclaims the Oneness of God, it is in essence a form of Advaita belief. Emotionally comforting and peaceful as it may be to think or believe so, this type of assertion can simply not be substantiated and would be considered heretical by most Muslims. Even more than being totally inaccurate, it represents a particular type of intellectual double-think which aims to 'bring into the fold' and 'convert' those who by rights should not be there, through saying 'yes we accept what you believe in, you can continue to believe in it once you join us, now come and listen to what we say too, and eventually you will see that we are right.'

Chinmayananda has constructed at the entrance to his Powai centre a large Shiva temple with images also of Krishna and other deities, where a resident Shaivite Brahmin performs all the prescribed rituals, services and ceremonies ; there are also plans afoot to construct an attached multi-purpose hall to cater for weddings and other functions 'particularly for the lower income group of devotees', as well as a large open-air auditorium with seating for over a thousand people. Other centres have temples dedicated to Rama and others. The aim of this is unashamedly to give the centre a popular appeal, to attract a wider audience of devout Hindus who may know nothing of the Upanishads or Advaita. His talks on the *Bhagavadgita* attract wide audiences, not so much because the *Gita*

is an embodiment of Advaita philosophy, but rather because he uses the widespread devotional appeal of the *Gita* to attract the masses to hear his Advaitist interpretation of it. This is an understandable method from his point of view. Yet it is nonetheless manipulative and has an element of deviousness to it, particularly when he later turns round and announces that temple-worship and devotion to God are inferior paths which cannot of themselves lead to full self-knowledge. The very motto of the Chinmaya Mission—'To give maximum happiness to the maximum number for the maximum time is our religion'—is so vague and nondescript as to be a meaningless platitude with which virtually anyone could sympathize: which is presumably Chinmayananda's aim in choosing it. Chinmayananda is without doubt a learned, experienced and capable teacher in the traditional mould, worthier than many to be called a Guru in the line of his Upanishadic predecessors. Yet at the heart of his teachings lies that element of 'double-think' which has characterized the thoughts of several generations of Hindu religious thinkers, and which he now uses in seeking to gain a greater and more widespread popularity for his Mission.

CHAPTER VII

Sathya Sai Baba

In the southern part of the state of Karnataka, close to the border with Tamil Nadu, lies the fast-expanding commercial centre of Bangalore, a garden-city with broad tree-lined avenues and pleasant parks. This is the jumping-off point for either of the two ashrams of Sathya Sai Baba, the 'miracle man' of India. The main ashram is some three hours' drive by taxi—or the best part of a day's bump on local buses—through the green and hilly countryside of south-eastern Karnataka and across the state border into Andhra Pradesh to the tiny village of Puttaparthi where Sathya was born and brought up. The village itself has scarcely grown since those days, but grafted on to it, is now an expanding string of Sathya Sai Baba establishments—including a school and a university—which the traveller passes before arriving at the gates of the ashram itself, whose centre consists of an almost Disneyland-type castle where the man himself resides. Eager crowds assemble here morning and evening, carefully shepherded into ordered rows squatting cross-legged in the bare stone courtyard to await the appearance of Sathya Sai Baba and obtain his 'Darshan'—a sight of the man, being present before him, which in itself is deemed to confer countless blessings on the beholder. He wanders slowly before the assembled silent crowd, aware and revelling in being their focus of attention: occasionally stopping, sometimes at the prompting of his attendants, to exchange a word with a particular devotee or one who attracts his attention, to sign an autograph, accept a gift, invite a devotee for a personal audience, or perform his now-famous 'miracle' of materializing sacred ash with a nonchalant wave and twist of his wrist.

The Puttaparthi Ashram contains residential blocks of flats as well as bungalows to house the hundreds of devotees, from India and abroad, who flock to see the guru and imbibe his teachings. But it would be sensible to inquire in Bangalore about his current whereabouts, since on a whim

he will jump into one of his limousines and decamp to his other ashram at Whitefield, on the outskirts of Bangalore itself: an even grander and larger building, where still greater crowds will line both sides of the extensive driveway from the gates to the ashram, striving to gain a sight of what they firmly believe to be God in human form.

Sathya Sai Baba, the man of miracles, claims to be an avatar—an incarnation or descent on earth—of the god Vishnu. He also claims to be a reincarnation of an earlier Sai Baba who lived at Shirdi in Maharashtra; it is accordingly with him that our account will begin.

The original Sai Baba was born to a poor boatman and his wife, but was abandoned by them at birth and was brought up by a Muslim couple and named 'Babu Patil' by them. Babu at an early age started setting up lingams (the phallic symbol of Shiva) in mosques and reciting verses from the Koran in Hindu temples, thereby upsetting both Hindu and Muslim communities; and his foster-mother eventually handed him over to an ashram orphanage. After some time there, Babu took up residence in a deserted mosque in the village of Shirdi, where he remained for the rest of his life, revered by the local Hindu and Muslim communities as a holy man and famed especially for his performance of miracles of various sorts. He died on 15 October 1918; before doing so, he is said to have prophesied that he would return eight years after his death, and would then live in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Eight years later, on 23 November 1926, the future Sathya Sai Baba was born in the small village of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh. His grandfather, Kondama Raju, who died in 1950 when he was reportedly 110 years old, was a pious Hindu and a confirmed vegetarian renowned in the village for reciting and acting out scenes from the *Ramayana*. His father, Pedda Venkappa Raju, was a local farmer; he and his wife Easwaramma had four children, two sons and two daughters, the youngest son being named Satyanarayana Raju. From a young age Sathya followed his grandfather's lead in being a strong vegetarian with an aversion to the killing of animals; he also had a predilection for beggars, and would forgo his own meals in favour of giving food to a passing beggar. He was by all accounts a precocious child, particularly when it came to singing devotional songs and religious verses for local village plays—an activity in which he excelled. But in his classes at the nearby school, he was described as both quiet and listless, and he has remained hostile to academic learning and the arts, particularly all forms of literature and the

cinema. Nonetheless, at the age of ten, he got together a group of children to sing and perform religious plays, including songs about Sai Baba of Shirdi; on one occasion, when singing about the Man-lion (Narasimha) incarnation of Vishnu, the young Sathya was so possessed of the idea that he started roaring and jumping about like a lion, and it was only with difficulty that he was eventually calmed down. Many of these plays were written by Sathya's father and performed by various members of the family including Sathya. Then Sathya was sent away to a secondary school in Kamalapur, where he lived with his elder brother and his wife, and again proved himself in class to be 'quiet and well-behaved'. His brother was shortly after posted as a teacher to nearby Uravakondu, and Sathya too went with him to the school, where at the age of twelve he made a mark writing and producing a moralistic play with the theme—the need to match your actions to your words. He also started distinguishing himself in finding lost articles and in producing sweets out of nowhere for his classmates.

On 8 March 1940, at the age of thirteen, Sathya was apparently bitten by a scorpion. The next day he fell unconscious, his breathing was faint and his body stiff. Despite the ministrations of a doctor, Sathya began to adopt strange behaviour patterns, not responding when spoken to, seemingly unaware of his surroundings, eating little, and being almost continually silent except for occasional bursts into song or poetry. His parents were summoned, but declared him to be uncontrollable; the District Medical Officer was called for a second medical opinion, and prescribed medicines for Sathya's fits and hysteria. Yet to little avail: Sathya still alternated between weeping and laughing, declaring that life was a play. Astrologers, magicians, priests, and finally an exorcist were summoned and dismissed; his parents eventually took him back to Puttaparthi, where further doctors and exorcists were called in. But no result had been achieved when, on 23 May 1940, Sathya announced to the bemused household: 'I am Sai Baba, I have come to ward off all your troubles, keep your houses clean and pure and worship me every Thursday'. Despite medical advice that Sathya was disturbed and should be put in an institution, his brother took him back with him in June to school—where he attracted widespread attention and (on Thursdays) devotion, both by the local villagers and by his headmaster. Finally, on 20 October 1940, the fourteen-year-old Sathya announced to his distraught brother and sister-in-law: 'I am no longer your Sathya, I am

Sai; I am going, I do not belong to you, my devotees are calling me, I have my work, I cannot stay any longer.' He was given an almost royal procession by his devotees back to Puttaparthi; those who soon started flocking to see him were accommodated in makeshift sheds and tents, until a building was erected for him in 1944. The present building, called Prashanti Nilayam, was commenced at the end of 1950 and completed around two years later. Sathya continues to base himself at Puttaparthi, where the complex now includes primary and secondary schools and a University Institute; he also periodically visits his other ashram, named Brindavan, which is at Whitefield just outside Bangalore. Sathya Sai Baba schools are to be found in most parts of India, as also in many countries around the world, promoting his teachings and person.

Sathya Sai Baba is, in a sense, his own message: the message and the man are to a large extent inseparable. A cynic might claim that this is not least because the message itself is so insubstantial; and it is certainly the case that nearly all hagiographic accounts concentrate on Sai Baba and his miracles, relegating his teachings to a later chapter almost as an afterthought. Sai Baba offers few revolutionary or novel teachings; on the contrary, he emphasizes that his role is simply to re-expound Dharma, universal law and religion, and to bring man back on to the straight and narrow path of morality and good conduct. At the centre of Sai Baba's outlook lies God:

'God is everywhere and in everything, the whole creation is from Him and He is in the creation.' God is neither personal nor impersonal, yet also at times both; He is formless, yet takes form; He is within the creation, yet at the same time lies infinitely beyond it, immanent and also transcendent. The Atman or essence of man is identical with and of the same essence as God: yet while the Atman is dependent on God, God is not dependent on it. 'The waves on the surface of an ocean have no independent existence of their own. They cannot exist if the ocean is not there, but the ocean will continue to exist if the waves are not there. The waves have to depend on the existence of the ocean for their own existence, but the ocean is independent of the waves. A wave can say "I belong to you," because it cannot exist without the ocean. But the ocean will never say "I belong to you" because it can exist without the waves. The individual is like the waves and the Lord is comparable to the ocean. There is an inseparable connection between the two.'

This connection is perhaps best appreciated in the relationship between

Sai Baba and his devotees, for whom Sai Baba is himself God. The relationship is one of wonder, adoration and worship, one of Bhakti or reverence directed towards a secret and mysterious God who is infinitely greater than man, but from time to time reveals small parts of the mystery of himself, even within man. Man's true identity as Atman has, in Sai Baba's teaching, been clouded by a fog of ignorance which has led him to identify himself with his ego. Yet he, like the universe, was created not out of nothing but out of God's infinite Self; his true inner self is none other than part of this unchanging divine essence of God, while his body and all around him are aspects of Maya, illusory in the sense of being changing and not ultimately real or permanent. Man's purpose in life is therefore to find out who he really is, to perceive his true divine nature, his real self.

The path for achieving this has four aspects to it: Satya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema. Satya, truth, consists of the acquisition of knowledge (Jnana): knowledge about God, man, the universe and man's purpose and role in it. This knowledge is gained through reading books and listening to teachings, and gradually builds into a fuller understanding and a correct outlook on life and on man's nature. Yet Jnana, the path of knowledge, is for Sai Baba only a preliminary path; it must go hand in hand especially with Bhakti, but is unlikely of itself to lead man to the realization of ultimate truth. Dharma, righteousness or right conduct, consists in following actions (Karma) which are in accordance with goodness and morality. Rules of correct conduct are set out in various scriptures, notably the *Bhagavadgita;* these rules must be followed in the full knowledge and consciousness that they are none other than Atma-dharma, the inner law of one's own being. Shanti, peace, is the development of inner peace and divine bliss which is man's innate nature; it is developed through subduing one's desires and emotions, evolving discrimination between true and false, the eternal and the temporary. It is a process of developing equanimity out of possessiveness and attachment, and of developing total self-control and purity of mind. Prema, love, is the divine love and compassion which, freed from selfish motives, of its own nature gives continuously. It is a loving sympathy which shares the joys and sorrows of others, which pours out from itself towards God and towards all life. It is a love which is unattached to its object, which arises from detachment and understanding; it is love which comes, too, from faith and surrender to God, from devotion (Bhakti) to God and the divine will. Devotion and

surrender can of themselves rid man of his ego; devotion, in the forms of worship and the chanting of verses and hymns or bhajans, should evolve from the emotional to the unemotional, from the self-motivated to the self-less. The very nature of love is to give forth of itself; its highest manifestation is in selfless loving action towards others, which is itself the witness of the operation of true Dharma in the world. These four aspects of the path are for Sai Baba neither separate nor hierarchical, with one leading to the other or being better than another; all are interlinked, yet his teachings clearly demonstrate that the performance of correct actions through Prema or Bhakti takes pride of place, and he always refers to his followers as Bhaktas or devotees.

Sai Baba's teachings themselves contain little that is new or different from what can be found elsewhere in the Hindu tradition. What is undoubtedly new and different is Sai Baba's conviction and teaching that he is an avatar. The Epics and Puranas describe nine previous avatars of the god Vishnu, with one called Kalki still to come at the end of the Kali Yuga. The main purpose of these descents of the god to earth was to destroy evil, establish Dharma and teach man true religion and right conduct—as was done above all by Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*. Sai Baba first claimed that he was a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi; subsequently he claimed, and his followers believe, that he is an avatar of Vishnu, and is God in human form. As Sai Baba himself has expressed it:

> I engage in no asceticism; I do not meditate on anything at all; I am not an aspirant; I am neither man nor woman, old nor young; yet I am all of these. I am a man amongst men and I am God when I am by myself. You may be seeing me today for the first time, but you are all old acquaintances for me, I know you all through and through. I have come to show you how to live usefully and die profitably. Those who worship me are not nearer to me than those who do not; all are mine. My main task is the re-establishment of the Vedas and Shastras, and revealing the knowledge about them to all people. The establishment of Dharma is my aim. The spread of Dharma through teaching it is my object. The avatar behaves in a human way so that mankind feels kinship with the avatar, but he rises to superhuman heights so that mankind may aspire to reach the heights and through that aspiration reach him. I do not take

anything from anyone except their love and devotion. I call you to me and even grant worldly boons, so that you may turn Godward. No avatar has done this before: going among the masses, counselling them, guiding them, consoling them, uplifting them and directing them along the path of Satya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema. If you give up and surrender to the Lord, he will guide you and guard you. The Lord has come just for that very task.

As God, Sai Baba demonstrates his divinity through miracles, which according to him are spontaneous proofs of divine majesty. The literature and tales of his followers contain innumerable instances of these. Most prominent are Sai Baba's materializations of objects apparently out of nowhere: particularly *vibhuti* or sacred ash, which he will pour into the hands of his devotees, and also such items as lockets or gold watches. There are innumerable tales of his omniscience—knowing what is happening elsewhere, or what is going to happen in future; of his control over the weather, of his healing or curative powers. Many of these are very similar to the stories and accounts written about Shirdi Sai Baba, who would, for example, cure his disciples of illnesses and declare that he knew all that they did and was constantly present with them. For his devotees, these are all clear manifestations and proofs of his divinity; the objects he materializes and gives to his devotees are divine talismans given by the grace of God to sanctify and protect the recipient, as well as to remind him constantly of Sai Baba.

The miracles are undoubtedly the major pull for the majority of Sai Baba's followers, as well as being concluding proof that he is God. An entire hagiographic miracle literature has grown up around him; his early life has been reinterpreted to closely parallel that of the young Krishna, to demonstrate how even as a child he had perfect knowledge, understanding and omniscience and was quietly working small miracles. The miracles have also 'attracted' in another sense writers like Abraham Kovoor, who have attempted—often successfully—to disprove many of them; as well as magicians like P.C. Sorcar. Sorcar on one occasion gained admittance to an audience with Sai Baba, and when Sai Baba materialized a sweet, Sorcar promptly did the same for Sai Baba. I have myself been less than two feet away from Sai Baba when he materialized *vibhuti*, with a couple of characteristic shakes of the sleeve rather suggestive of a

member of the Magic Circle. As for his knowledge of past and future events, questions are often phrased by his followers in such a way as to lend themselves to the type of interpretation and omniscience which he expresses. It is easy to say, 'Yes, I know all about, your problem, I have known for a long time, but it is soon going to be solved'; if it is then solved, it becomes another proof of his divinity and enters the hagiographic literature; if it is not solved, Sai Baba will claim it is because the follower did not have the right attitude or sufficient faith—which again manifests his divine will—and it will await hagiographizing until, as is often the case, circumstances change and the problem disappears. When Sai Baba delivers a discourse, this is invariably in his native Telugu with someone else giving an English translation; yet his followers remain convinced that he is multilingual, fluent in every language of the world, and simply out of modesty chooses not to advertise this aspect of his all-knowingness. In other words, if there is already a will to believe, everything becomes reinterpreted and accepted in terms of that belief; and the more it reinforces itself, the less it is open to argument, to logical or rational thought.

Sathya Sai Baba's person and teachings do not attempt to appeal to a rational type of approach, nor indeed to a logical or philosophical way of thinking. Jnana is implicitly subordinated to Bhakti; Sai Baba's teachings themselves seem often self-contradictory, unnecessarily mystifying, aimed particularly at those who have little background or grounding in Hinduism and whom he presumes to be near-beginners on the path:

> Monism as propounded by Shankaracharya was too simple a solution to satisfy the inner urges of the majority of individuals. They had in them the yearning to worship and to dedicate themselves to a higher power, and they could not easily grasp the truth of their inner reality being the one and only one. Therefore Ramanujacharya commented on the Vedic text and religious scriptures from a new point of view. The path of devotion was laid down to take man and merge him with God. Complete surrender and the annihilation of individuality are also beyond most aspirants. This craving of man was sought to be satisfied by Madhvacharya, who declared that the Jiva or individual is separate from the universal. In Advaita, a flash of intellectual illumination reveals that the Atman alone exists and that all else is a deluding appearance. The Vishishtadvaita

posits that the river is an integral part of the sea. Dvaita points out that the purity derived from adoration and worship is enough to draw down the fulfilling grace of God. The Sai religion is the essence of all faiths and religions, including those like Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Their goal, their target, their purpose and their aim were all the same. The holy duty of man is to be ever aware of the Atman that is installed in every living being; this is the basis of the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. All of you who have entered the Sathya Sai organization must have the courage and the determination to say that the essence of all religions is the religion of the Sathya Sai organization.

Sai Baba's ultimate aim, therefore, is to establish a single true religion with himself as its God. The very first prayer he taught his new followers, at the age of fourteen, was, 'Meditate in your mind on the feet of the Guru: that can take you across the difficult sea of Samsara.' For Sai Baba there is only one true Guru, one Satguru, namely God himself who is now announcing himself in the earthly form of Sathya. Guru Sai Baba alone can guide, because he alone is the very incarnation of God, of truth, of the goal. Some earthly teachers might occasionally come to realize their nature as Atman, but it is Sai Baba alone who is not a wave but the ocean itself. Herein lies his unique appeal to his followers: an appeal based more on emotion, wonder and reverence than on reason, and an appeal which frames itself in the ever-popular garb that while all religions are the same, it is the Sai religion which is actually the best and is the fulfilment and ultimate revelation of all others. From the moment of the scorpion bite, Sai Baba has set out to propound himself as God and to propound teachings—and perform miracles—to attract the masses to him by straightforward and didactic methods, adopting such simple catch-phrases as 'Be good, see good and do good: that is the way to God', and laying emphasis on seeking God through activities in the world rather than through renunciation or asceticism. And his followers, from around the world, flock literally to his feet eager to behold his wonder-making and to refocus their worship from God to Sathya Sai Baba, the supreme and only true Guru.

CHAPTER VIII

Ramdas and Krishnabai

Some hundred kilometres to the south of Mangalore, through the tropically green countryside of northern Kerala on the south-west coast of India, lies the small town of Kanhangad hugging the shores of the Arabian Sea and almost camouflaged from the casual passer-by by lush coconut plantations and dense jungle vegetation. A short distance inland from Kanhangad is to be found, amidst similarly lush surroundings, the ashram founded by Ramdas and inherited by his pupil, Krishnabai. Unlike the ashrams of more flamboyant Gurus, it is a relatively simple affair: a central shrine and meditation hall, from where an incessant chant of the names of God pervades the air; a couple of ramshackle office buildings, small shrines to Ramdas and Krishnabai, a simple eating hall and equally simple accommodation for devotees staying for either long or short periods. The ashram has a resigned yet peaceful atmosphere, as if content at any moment to be swallowed up and absorbed into the green jungle that surrounds it. 'Mother' Krishnabai, whom I first met in 1978, passed away at the start of 1989; yet her influence, like that of her Guru Ramdas, still pervades the ashram and the teachings still claim a wide following both in India and around the world.

The story of Ramdas and Krishnabai is one of Bhakti between Guru and disciple taken to its ultimate, albeit inherently logical, extreme. Ramdas lived from 10 April 1884 to 25 July 1963. He was born into a family of Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins at Kanhangad in northern Kerala; his father, Balakrishna Rao, was a clerk in government service, and was also devoted to the singing of bhajans or religious songs, especially those of Tukaram and other Maharashtrian saints. He and his wife, Lalithabai, had thirteen children, of whom the sixth was Vithal Rao, later known as Ramdas. Vithal had by his own admission absolutely no interest in school life or in study, and in his school career he was a complete failure. He was more interested in the wandering sannyasins and swamis who would on

occasions stay at the house, and in an aunt who was constantly singing and repeating God's name; he preferred the freedom, solitude and peace of the local fort to the strict discipline of home and school. He read avidly all the books in the school library, and was particularly taken with the idea of a God of love as presented in the Bible, also with the ideas of the Theosophical Society. Having failed his final school exams, he eventually pursued a three-year course in textile engineering in Bombay, which he passed despite spending most of his time reading books on literature and philosophy. He subsequently worked in textile mills in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, but found himself more in sympathy with the oppressed workers than with the management of which he was a part; he also made a fairly unsuccessful arranged marriage in 1908 to Rukmabai, who bore him a daughter. Further mill jobs, often only for brief periods of time, and lengthy periods of unemployment followed; and Vithal turned increasingly towards a detachment from his work and an attachment to bhajans and chanting the name of God at all times, getting as little as two hours' sleep a night. At this point his father attempted to intervene, but seeing the single-minded devotion of his son he instead gave him a new mantra to utter—*'Shri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram'*. Vithal accepted this as his initiation, and subsequently always referred to his father as Gurudev. His constant chanting of the name of Ram led him soon to believe that Ram was the only reality, beyond which all else—including himself in the sense of his ego—was false. He led an increasingly simple and ascetic life and finally, against the pleas of his family and relations, he turned his back on worldly life in December 1922 at the age of thirty-eight. Assuming the name 'Ramdas' (Servant of Ram) he wandered for some time on pilgrimages, visiting shrines and sacred rivers, and eventually came back to settle first at Kasaragod and then in 1931 at nearby Kanhangad, where he founded an ashram called Anandashram, the Ashram of Bliss. Apart from his travels around India, he also made one 'world tour' in 1954, visiting many parts of Europe, the United States and South-East Asia; the discourses he gave on these occasions were subsequently published by the ashram and give a detailed if sometimes conflicting account of his teachings.

Ramdas' teaching is based on Ramanuja's system of Vishishtadvaita or Qualified Non-Dualism. God, in the form of Ram, is the only ultimate reality, beyond which nothing exists or can exist; the individual soul, Atman or Jiva, is of the same essence as God, can come to know its true

nature as God, yet ultimately some subtle distinction still remains between it and God wherein its highest perception of itself can be reached in a relationship of love towards God. While in England during his world tour, Ramdas explained something of the relationship between God and Atman, adopting his usual style of referring to himself in the third person:

> There are four stages: Ramdas will describe them. One is that by complete surrender to the Divine Will, the ego is dissolved completely. Egolessness means realization of the all-pervading Spirit or God. Then we know that we and that Spirit are one. After that comes the vision of the Divine everywhere in the manifestation; the whole universe is thereafter seen as the expression of that Spirit. We see God everywhere. But there is a third stage still. In that we see the manifest and the unmanifest as the two aspects of another which is beyond both, which is unthinkable, incomprehensible and inexpressible. We can express something about the static and dynamic aspects, that is, the aspects without form and with form, but that which is beyond both these is inexpressible, incomprehensible and ineffable. The dynamic, the static and the unthinkable all together make the supreme Godhead. He is the all-inclusive and all-transcendent reality. Even after realizing that, there is a fourth stage in which we keep up a relationship with God. It is purely personal. He is our constant companion. We can talk to Him. We can feel His presence. That is the sweetest relationship. Having had all the earlier experiences we still enjoy a close relationship with the Divine in His personal presence, and that presence Ramdas has been asked by so many to define. But it is not possible to define that. He is the impersonal person.

Jnana or knowledge, for Ramdas, takes you as far as the first of these stages. Brahman is manifest as the universe, Prakriti or matter, and unmanifest as the Atman, Purusha or Soul; Jnana allows you to perceive the latter, but it is in Bhakti that the devotee sees the whole universe as God himself, and rejoices in that. The path which will bring about this realization is supremely that of constantly repeating, whether silently or aloud, the '*Jai Ram*' mantra which gradually comes to focus the mind on Ram as the sole reality: a reality to be perceived in the world around and

worshipped in the heart. As a devotee begins to see that Ram or God is everywhere, in all his fellow-men, this brings with it a joy and an outpouring of love towards mankind. The Guru occupies a unique place in awakening and bringing about this realization. For the Guru is Truth personified: not only has he himself realized his nature as God, he can also impart knowledge of this truth and help the devotee to realize it for himself—and to this extent is therefore greater even than God. A person may move from one earthly Guru to another, but in reality they are all the same, all personifications of a single truth in different forms. 'Before you find the Guru you worship God. If you pray to God for Moksha, He directs you to go to the Guru. After finding the Guru, there is no God apart. He is the all-inclusive Godhead. . . . Everything is Guru. In fact, God comes in the form of the Guru to lead the disciple. . . . You need not have the laborious process of meditation. Mentally or orally repeat the name of Ram. In course of time your mind will dissolve. Then you will realize you are the Self, God or Brahman. That is how it happened with Ramdas.'

That is how it happened also with Krishnabai, Ramdas' chief disciple and later his successor—but with a subtle yet profound difference. Krishnabai was born on 20 September 1903 in the small village of Haliyal. She was named Kutti and was the second eldest of six children; her father, Venkat Rao, was a government officer and forest contractor, who died when she was ten. Kutti, was from early childhood, devoted to temple-worship and sitting at the feet of swamis. She attended school only up to the age of eight, and after her father's death she was married when she was just twelve years old. Soon after she went to live in Bombay with her husband, Lakshmanrao Kalle, and bore him two sons when she was sixteen and eighteen years old. Pregnant for the third time at the age of twenty, she went to her mother's home promising to return to Bombay within a month; but this was postponed to five months, and meanwhile Lakshmanrao died after a brief illness. Stricken with grief and guilt, Kutti aborted her baby and then sought to commit suicide by swallowing opium, and was only saved by the prompt ministration of an emetic by her brother-in-law, Dr Rama Rao. For the next eight years she and her two sons lived with Rama Rao and his wife, Sundari. Even before Lakshmanrao's death Kutti had sought out a Guru, Shri Tammanna Shastri, who had initiated her with a mantra. After the Guru's death she searched again and was initiated by a further four Gurus but could not find fulfilment or realization through any of them. In 1928 Rama Rao

went abroad for further studies, and Kutti accompanied Sundari to her father's house in Kasaragod. It was then that she first met Ramdas at his ashram and was initiated by him with the '*Jai Ram*' mantra. She accepted Ramdas wholeheartedly as her Guru, and came to live at his ashram and to progress and learn under his guidance. And progressively she came to perceive God not as Ram but as her Guru Ramdas, all-pervading, all-guiding, all-compassionate. Her autobiography entitled *Guru's Grace* reflects in virtually every paragraph, her loving devotion towards her 'Papa' Ramdas as the incarnation of truth, of the goal:

> O All-prevading Papa! In 1928 you awakened in me a strong urge to become one with your eternal Being, and I came to you. After passing one year in your holy company I appealed to you to initiate me with the Ram Mantra. All-compassionate as you are, you gave me the most sacred mantra. You then advised me to stop reading any kind of books, to give up the use of the rosary while repeating the Mantra and to discontinue the worship of images. Instead, you counselled me to look on all beings and creatures in the world as Ram and to consider the service rendered to any one of them as service and worship of Ram Himself. O kindness-incarnate Papa! As I went on reciting the Ram-Nam, the remembrance of my relatives came with added force. To get over this hurdle, you asked me to take whatever through that arose in me as Ram Himself. Whenever I thought of God as Ram I felt that God was far away from me. But when I thought of God as Papa I felt His nearness. By this practice, after some time, I realized that all my relatives are yourself, and the thoughts about them as such disappeared. Then I looked upon everybody as you alone. I got the vision to behold you as everyone and everything. O Papa, the lover of devotees! During my spiritual discipline I reflected how, from my childhood onwards, you assumed various forms to guide me on the path. I recollected how you spoke as those persons and made me also speak. Papa, you are indeed compassion personified. Within only three years of this child's entry into your divine presence, you enabled her to realize your static, changeless and infinite Being. Just as the feeling of 'I'-ness in me pervades all parts of my physical being from head to foot and yet this 'I' is distinct from the body, so also I came to know

that I am at once the Universal Consciousness and the transcendent Truth. Infinite Papa! Verily I am your own embodiment. O Papa, the Divine Mother! You are omnipresent and, having become everything, you are also transcendent. You pervade within and without all that exists. O birthless and deathless Papa! As my mother and father you poured your love on me and received in response my love in the same measure. O Papa, who is all and beyond all! As I outgrew my childhood you infused into me the desire to learn by heart hymns glorifying God. When I was yet five or six years old you induced me to wish for initiation of Guru Mantra. For your child Krishnabai, you are all and all-in-one. For her, except you there is none. Having manifested yourself as the entire universe you are at once the player and the witness of all play. Having yourself become everything, you and Krishnabai are one. O Krishnabai, the Almighty and All-pervading Papa is dwelling in your heart. O infinite Papa! You in the form of my father possessed a very good nature. My mother, who is of course yourself, was of a guileless and peaceful nature. Now in my dynamic being I am maintaining with you the relationship of that of a child towards its mother, but without any sense of duality. While in body-consciousness, that is, before realization I did not feel any sense of duality between myself and the different parts of my body, so also now, after realizing that I am the entire universe and beyond it, I consider you as my Universal Mother even though you and I are one. O Purushottama Papa! You caused me to be born in your infinite creation and made me pass for twenty-five years through all the pains and joys of the worldly life. O Sadguru! You are the forms of all Gurus; verily, they are all your own manifestations.

This realization was reached for Krishnabai in 1931. Thereafter she remained with Ramdas at the ashram, accompanying him also on his world tour, and administering the day-to-day running of the ashram; on his death she also took over the spiritual guidance of devotees. Krishnabai herself died on 12 February 1989, and the mantle of Guruhood has now been taken over by Swami Sacchidananda, who has been at the ashram since 1949.

There is little that is proselytizing, or indeed either subtle or unique,

about Krishnabai; the 'uniqueness' of the way she expresses herself rests firmly on what Ramdas had been teaching. As an ashram administrator she was something of a dismal failure; under her guidance, the ashram was almost constantly in debt, not least because whatever money ever came her way she would prefer to redistribute to the poor and those she thought needed and deserved it most. She evidences an almost childlike naïvety and trustfulness; she gave no discourses, did not travel outside the ashram except to accompany Ramdas, and made neither world nor all-India tours to spread her teachings or attract others to her path. She was to that extent, merely a faithful exponent in thought and deed of Ramdas' teachings. Many Westerners, particularly from Europe, North America and Australasia, were nonetheless attracted—and continue to be attracted—to the ashram and those teachings. To some extent this can be ascribed to the longer-term influence of Ramdas' world tour. Beyond that however, lies the appeal of a philosophical system which reaffirms the supremacy and transcendance of God, and the total validity of Bhakti, devotion and worship.

Ramdas, and Krishnabai after him, was vague and contradictory in many points of his teaching. In some places he claims that the individual Atman or Jiva is of the same essence and yet in some sense inferior to God; in others he denies that individual Jivas exist, and in still others he avows that he is himself the supreme Godhead. Krishnabai on the other hand personifies par excellence the attitude of the devotee towards her Papa-God. She herself never claims to be the Guru—although logically this must follow, through her identification with her Papa—but she remains in wondrous adoration of the reality, greatness and magnificence of Papa which is within her and yet always beyond her. Ramdas, having failed at his activities within the world, finds a greater role for himself in proclaiming an unknown and unknowable God and proclaiming himself to be identical with it; Krishnabai, having also failed within the world, finds her fulfilment through total self-subordination to this Guru-Papa, through which again she can claim implicitly to be God. While Ramdas is the teacher attempting to formulate and propound the theory, Krishnabai is the pupil intent on putting these theories into practice—a practice which to start with surprised and alarmed both Ramdas and his other followers, but which he eventually had no alternative but to accept as a logical if somewhat eccentric extension of his own teachings. Krishnabai's very personal and personalized approach has perhaps tended

to somewhat eclipse any more widespread appeal of Ramdas' teachings, since it is an approach based on a particular relationship in which by definition others cannot share—even though they might try to take it as a model for their own relationship, not with Ramdas, since he is dead, but with a further Guru or with God. Yet Krishnabai's approach is, at the same time in a sense, very impersonal; all individuals lose their individual importance and character, and become manifestations of her Papa—a situation which may have been satisfactory for her, in wanting to shut off the harsh reality of the world, but which is scarcely calculated to be satisfactory to anyone else, particularly those who had no living personal relationship with Ramdas.

The teachings of Ramdas and Krishnabai are an implicit critique of Shankara's Advaita or Non-Dualism. For Ramdas, as for Krishnabai, the realization of truth or God comes not through knowledge or through devotion; knowledge, in the sense of an understanding of one's nature, of the theory, must be there as a foundation, but the experience arises primarily and consists in a feeling of wonder and devotion towards that which is within oneself and yet infinitely greater than oneself. Bhakti is both the start and the end of the path. 'Bhakti is the root, Vairagya (Detachment) is the tree, Jnana is the flower, and Para-Bhakti (Supreme Devotion) is the fruit. The juice of Para-Bhakti is Brahmananda (the joy of Brahman). That joy is the highest. The foundation is Jnana, the superstructure is Karma, and the dome is Para-Bhakti. These three comprise the one temple of God.' Yet, while holding Bhakti and the maintenance of an awareness of the ultimate supremacy of God over the Atman to be supreme, Ramdas—particularly during his world tour—also maintained that the goal of all religions was one and the same.

> Experiences of the mystics all over the world are the same. Jesus was one of the avatars. . . . Where is the harm in putting them (Jesus and Ramakrishna) on the same level? They are of the same, the Supreme Spirit. They are not different. The Supreme Spirit has manifested both as Ramakrishna Paramhansa and as Jesus. When you revere Shri Ramakrishna you revere Jesus and vice versa. . . . Divinity is unreal and unity is real. Based on the knowledge of this Truth all the great Masters cannot but love everybody alike. so Moksha of the Hindus, Nirvana of the Buddhists, 'Father in Heaven' of the Christians, Tao of Lao Tzu are one and the same. There is no difference in their teachings.

> Followers of those teachers have built religions around them—Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Sufism and the like. The Name of God should bring us together, dissolve our differences and make us one harmonious community in the world. Let us spread love everywhere and destroy darkness, hate, ill-will, strife and war.

Appealing words and sentiments; yet they are based not on reason but on emotion, and on an unwillingness to recognize that neither the teachings nor the goal are the same. The experience and awareness of Ramdas and Krishnabai is one in which God, reality, is the same as and yet at the same time sufficiently separate and greater than the devotee as to be worthy of worship and adoration. The experience and awareness of Non-Dualists, let alone of Theravada Buddhists or Jains, is different to this, as is also the way in which they describe in words the nature of that experience and of the relation between the individual and ultimate reality. What Ramdas, like others, is in fact saying is that while all religions may be the same, his own experience must be the highest and best because he is after all an incarnation of Truth, of Reality, of God. It is at once a justification of his own outlook and theories, and an implicit claim that the path and goal he has adopted is the best and only assured way of perceiving God. The Bhakti approach as witnessed by both Ramdas and Krishnabai involves an experience, and an attitude of mind, at variance with that of the Monist or Non-Dualist which no amount of emotional appeal to the oneness of all religions can overcome. Where Bhakti is supreme, as for Ramdas and Krishnabai, the one who achieves total self-knowledge without separation must necessarily be experiencing a lower level on the path.

CHAPTER IX

Bhaktivedanta and Krishna Consciousness

It could be London, New York or any other modern Western city. Above the noise of the traffic, amidst the thronging crowds moving purposefully about their daily tasks, there comes the sound of cymbals and drums, and a seemingly unending chant of 'Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare. . . .' A group of orange and pink-clad figures, shaven-headed except for a small tuft towards the back of the head, hoves into view, swaying rhythmically to the music and the chant, seemingly oblivious to the mild stir they are creating around them amongst passers-by and enrapt in their chanting and song. These are the Hare Krishna people, more correctly known as members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a society founded as recently as 1966 but basing itself on a tradition going back centuries. The ISKCON movement was founded in New York by an Indian, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada; it has spread rapidly both throughout the West and to India, where its major centres are now at Hare Krishna Land, just outside Bombay, and at Vrindavan near Mathura to the south-east of Delhi, by tradition the home of Krishna, incarnation of the God Vishnu.

The man who was to found the ISKCON movement was born in the Tollygunge suburb of Calcutta on 1 September 1896, and was named Abhay Charan De. His father, Gour Mohan De, was a moderately wealthy cloth merchant, and also an ardent devotee of Radha-Govinda—Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna the cowherd and his beloved Radha. Gour Mohan raised his son in the same tradition: worshipping Krishna, and adopting pure vegetarian habits to the extent of never touching tea or coffee. When Abhay's mother, Rajani, suggested that Abhay might become a lawyer when he grew up—which at that time would have meant going to London to study—Gour Mohan refused to expose Abhay to such Western influences, and instead taught him to sing hymns, read scriptures

and play the *mridangam* or double-ended drum used in devotional services. The young Abhay was spoilt by both his parents, and was invariably given his own way. Nonetheless he went to kindergarten—against his will at first—and had private tuition at home until he was eight, and then went to the Mutty Lall Seal Free school and thereafter to the Scottish Churches' College. There he studied English, Sanskrit, Philosophy and Economics, one class below Subhas Chandra Bose who was later to found and lead the Indian National Army. After four years' study Abhay passed his B.A., but refused to accept the diploma in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call at that time for Indians not to be tainted by accepting benefits or careers offered by the British oppressors.

During his third year at college his father had also arranged Abhay's marriage to Radharani, an eleven-year-old girl to whom Abhay felt little attraction. Now, on graduation, Gour Mohan arranged for his son to take up a job with a Calcutta-based pharmaceutical company.

It was at this point in his life that one of Abhay's friends persuaded him to meet Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, a leading Gaudiya Vaishnava in the tradition of Chaitanya—a tradition with which Abhay was already familiar through his childhood upbringing. This particular form of Vaishnavism was characterized not so much by intellectual or theological argument as by emotional surrender to a supreme and loving personal God: a total surrender, which Abhay found attractive but beyond his reach at that time. Nonetheless from that first meeting Abhay accepted Bhaktisiddhanta as his spiritual Guru: but his ability to concentrate on Vaishnava pursuits was limited by his need to provide for his wife and, from 1921, their first child. To augment his income, Abhay took up the post of pharmaceutical sales agent for north India, based in Allahabad. He opened his own pharmacy in Allahabad, and from that base he would frequently travel to promote his pharmaceutical sales. He also frequented the newly-opened Gaudiya temple in Allahabad, taking an active part in the services and contributing to their funds. In 1932 he travelled to Vrindavan to listen to a talk by Bhaktisiddhanta, who by this time had gone far in promoting Vaishnava teachings through the establishment of temples and ashrams and the printing of journals and magazines to spread his teachings. A month later Bhaktisiddhanta came to Allahabad, and Abhay was formally initiated as one of his disciples. Abhay's devotion to Vaishnava study and worship increased; but he was not at that time drawn to adopt the life of a or renunciant, both because of a sense of duty

towards his wife and now three children, and because of a desire to make a success of his business. The latter was not faring well: his agency for the Calcutta pharmaceutical firm became embroiled in debt, and he was relieved of charge and instead, became for a while, agent for a Bombay-based company, seeking at the same time to establish his own manufacturing firm. He also started publishing poems and speeches in one of Bhaktisiddhanta's magazines for which he received encouragement from Bhaktisiddhanta and an exhortation to explain and preach in English the teachings of Chaitanya. This was Bhaktisiddhanta's last instruction to Abhay before he died in 1937: and it left Abhay inspired and convinced that this should henceforth be his mission in life.

With Bhaktisiddhanta's death, the Gaudiya movement became fragmented through legal and personal disputes over who should succeed him. So, too, Abhay's business in Bombay fell apart, and he moved his family to Calcutta where he set up a small shop, manufacturing and selling his own tonics and medicines. But, to the annoyance and frustration of his wife, his interest was not so much in his business as in his devotions. In 1939 he published a short article entitled 'Introduction to Geetopanishad' which—with the background of his Vaishnava devotions—earned him the title 'Bhaktivedanta' from his Gaudiya friends: the title by which he was later commonly to be known. The advent of the Second World War convinced Abhay more than ever that what people lacked most was an awareness of God—a consciousness of Krishna—and in 1944 he produced the first edition of a magazine entitled *Back to Godhead* which was intended to promote the teachings of Chaitanya and propound the importance of Krishna-consciousness and of man's relation with this 'Supreme Personality of Godhead'. Publication was suspended after two issues due to lack of funds. After the war, Abhay closed his Calcutta shop and opened a new manufacturing base in Lucknow, while pursuing at the same time what had now become his ambition—to write a translation and commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*. The Lucknow venture failed, as did a further venture which Abhay tried to set up in Allahabad. He now rarely saw his family, who had remained throughout in Calcutta, and felt alienated from them through their lack of interest in his religious pursuits. In 1952 he revived publicatior of *Back to Godhead*, and set up in Jhansi a 'League of Devotees', a branch of the Gaudiya sect designed to be a Krishna-consciousness society that would expand into a world movement and have centres for spiritual development

all over the world. When his Allahabad business finally folded up after a burglary, Abhay returned to Calcutta where he thought he would raise money for the League through further business there. But this idea also failed; and when his wife, in a fit of frustration, traded his much-prized copy of the *Bhagavata Purana* (the chief work relating the life of Krishna) for some tea-biscuits, Abhay in disgust finally turned his back on his home and family at the age of fifty-eight, after thirty-six years of marriage.

Matters scarcely improved immediately thereafter. Evicted from the premises in Jhansi—where he had been able to recruit only one follower of the League—Abhay moved first to Mathura and then to Delhi, where he managed once again to restart publication of *Back to Godhead*, and sought to sell copies of it on street corners and in offices. Over the next few years he based himself primarily in Vrindavan and travelled from there seeking to raise funds for his publications and for what he increasingly saw as his mission to spread the message of Krishna outside India. In 1959 Abhay was formally initiated into the Gaudiya Vaishnava sect as a and took the name Bhaktivendanta Swami Maharaj. For the next few years he busied himself with writing the first three volumes of a translation on the *Srimad Bhagavatam* or *Bhagavata Purana* and with seeking sponsors to fund its publication and promote its sale. In 1965 he also found a sponsor in the form of Sumati Morarji, head of the Scindia Steamship Company, to fund his long-standing ambition to travel to America: and he sailed to New York in the summer of 1965 at the age of sixty-nine.

On landing in New York with only his trunk of books, a few clothes and seven dollars' worth of rupees, Abhay established himself under a tree in Tomkins Square Park and started chanting the Hare Krishna Mantra. Not surprisingly, he soon attracted attention and gathered his first followers and admirers, who saw to his daily needs for food and shelter while he, in return, delivered lectures, taught chanting and music, and continued his determined programme of translating the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and writing further books and articles. The owner of a record company invited him to record an LP of the Hare Krishna chant, which proved a success and increased his notoriety. In 1966 he formally founded ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the following year he was able to establish a further temple and centre in San Francisco. Over the next few years the ISKCON movement flourished and expanded; Abhay authored in total some eighty books, made fourteen

tours, established 108 temples, centres, schools and farm communities throughout the world, and witnessed his dancing and Hare Krishna-chanting disciples become a familiar sight in many world capitals. He finally returned to Vrindavan, where he died on 14 November 1977 at the age of eighty-one.

The teaching of Krishna consciousness as propounded by Bhaktivedanta is fully in line with the great tradition of Krishna-Bhakti or devotionalism to the person of Krishna as God-incarnate which has its roots in the *Bhagavadgita* and in the *Bhagavata Purana*. The form in which Bhaktivedanta encouraged such devotionalism to be practised is furthermore solidly in the tradition of the medieval Vaishnava teacher, Chaitanya. In this respect Bhaktivedanta is no more—and often claimed to be no more—than an expounder of these traditions. The *Bhagavadgita* is a scripture which contains a number of different traditions, most notably those of Vedanta and Bhakti. The traditions are not always harmoniously blended, and the *Gita* is consequently a text which lays itself open to varying interpretations. The interpretation adopted by the Bhakti tradition, and by Bhaktivedanta, is a fully theistic and in many respects almost dualistic one. For Bhaktivedanta, God revealed Himself in the *Gita* as Krishna, who thus represents what he calls the 'Supreme Personality of Godhead'. For him, those passages in the *Gita* are supreme in which Krishna teaches that man can only understand God through devotion and love, and that it is only the devotee who serves God out of selfless love who can draw close to God. The main aim of life for Bhaktivedanta was for man to develop a constant and everyday awareness of the presence of God: for God is always present, man has simply forgotten this due to immersion in a materially-conditioned life. God for Bhaktivedanta is Krishna, and awareness of God is Krishna-consciousness. The easiest way to develop such awareness is by chanting the Hare Krishna Mantra—a constant invocation of God's name which gradually implants itself in the consciousness and focuses the mind's attention away from material daily worries and on to God. This is to be supplemented by reading and studying the scriptures about God/Krishna (according to Bhaktivedanta's translations and interpretations), notably the *Gita*, *Bhagavatam*, and the life of Chaitanya. But study and knowledge are always strongly subordinated to loving devotion or Bhakti: such is the essence of developing Krishna-consciousness.

It was Chaitanya (AD 1485–1533) who especially introduced a high

of emotional fervour to the worship of Krishna. Chaitanya was ardently opposed to the Non-Dualist or Advaita teachings of Shankara, and was equally ardently devoted to the person of Krishna to the point of infatuation and obsession. He and his followers would sit together for hours singing hymns in praise of Krishna with instrumental accompaniment, until they lost themselves in ecstasy; then they would sally out, drums beating and flags flying, and march through the streets dancing and singing to Krishna. This particular tradition, which fell into abeyance soon after Chaitanya's death, was revived by Bhaktivedanta and has since become one of the most characteristic features of the Krishna-consciousness movement.

While the *Gita* contains in many respects the basis for the worship of God in personal form, namely as Krishna, the *Bhagavata Purana* or *Srimad Bhagavatam*—composed in final form around AD 950—expounds at length on the stories about Krishna: his birth and childhood in Vrindavan, his sporting with the local cowherdesses—particularly Radha—and his defeating the evil King Kamsa. The love of Radha for Krishna is interpreted in the Bhakti tradition as a paradigm and model of man's love for God in the form of joyful surrender to the lover-deity Krishna, who provides for every need and negates all worries and cares. It is this paradigm of lover and beloved which forms the basis of the relationship between Krishna and devotee in which the devotee abandons himself in ecstatic emotional submission and love and allows the consciousness of his lover-God to suffuse and encompass his own. In expounding this theme, Bhaktivedanta's teaching emphasizes the development of a form of mindless emotional submission as opposed to a studious and rational approach. Yet Bhaktivedanta's teaching is also—in the strict Vaishnava tradition of his own upbringing—highly disciplined and restrictive. His disciples are forbidden to eat meat, fish or eggs, to drink tea or coffee or take any other intoxicants or drugs, to partake in 'illicit sex'—which includes all acts for pleasure rather than procreation, and the latter only once a month. In this respect it is a strict and puritanical movement, which compensates for these restrictions by affording a strong sense of belonging to a naïvely loving community.

For Bhaktivedanta, having a Guru is the first essential on the path to reaching God:

> We are all in darkness in this material world. The Guru's

business is to bring his disciples from darkness to light. The Guru takes the torchlight of knowledge and presents it before the living entity enveloped in darkness. One may ask whether the Guru is absolutely necessary. The Vedas inform us that he is: the Vedas enjoin us to seek out a Guru. The Guru is one because he comes in a disciplic succession. The message is one: the genuine Guru has only an opinion, and that is the opinion expressed by Krishna. The Guru does not misinterpret the word of Krishna: he may be this person or that, but the message is the same. The bona fide Guru will simply present what the supreme Guru, God, says in bona fide scripture. The Guru is Krishna's representative: therefore the Guru should be offered the same respect one would offer to God. If we surrender to the bona fide Guru, we surrender to God. The real Guru is God's representative. He represents the Supreme Lord, just as a viceroy represents a king.

The distinction between Guru and God is in many respects a fine one for Bhaktivedanta. On the one hand the Guru is God's representative, on the other he is merely the bearer of God's message; as representative, he should legitimately be treated as if he were God, while as messenger his value lies only in the message he brings. Bhaktivedanta himself was not averse towards the end of his life to being treated and feted as God's representative, being driven in large, expensive cars and staying in first-class hotels. Yet he was equally not averse, particularly earlier in his life, to living in poverty and simplicity, although he remained insistent—with some justification—on his own status as Guru and as inheritor of the 'disciplic succession' from Chaitanya via his Guru Bhaktisiddhanta: a claim which was not, however, unanimously accepted by the Gaudiya Vaishnava community.

Bhaktivedanta was perhaps above all something of a fundamentalist. He believed in and taught the literal truth of Vedic and later Hindu scriptures, particularly the *Gita* and *Bhagavatam*, and in any case of doubt he would always seek and cite some scriptural justification rather than claim anything through his own inspiration. He accepted anyone—from any religious or social background—into the Krishna-Consciousness movement, but insisted that it must remain a society for Krishna-conciousness rather than God-conciousness because God had supremely manifested Himself as Krishna through the *Gita* and later

Hindu scriptures. These were also, of course, the scriptures and the tradition with which he himself was familiar, almost to the exclusion of all others. Bhaktivedanta similarly laid down for his disciples the traditional forms of Hindu temple worship of the deities Krishna and Radha, as to the traditional 'Rath Yatra' or annual chariot festival when the figures of the deities are carried through the streets on processional chariots, although for ISKCON this developed into a somewhat more than annual event more akin to a promotional spirit-raising and fund-raising activity. There is indeed a certain naïvety and blinkeredness in both the movement and its followers, and a simplicity often springing from deep emotional insecurity and the need for a strong, authoritative and reassuring leader. The Krishna-Consciousness movement satisfies such needs by providing an authoritative Guru—Bhaktivedanta—and a supreme and transcendent God—Krishna. For Bhaktivedanta, the personal aspect of God and the separation between man and God is crucial:

> In the *Bhagavadgita* it is said that only less-intelligent persons consider that God is originally impersonal but assumes a form when He incarnates. The Krishna philosophy, based on the authority of the Vedas, is that originally the Absolute Truth is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Westerners are being misled by impersonal Indian speculation. Krishna is personal, and He is the Supreme Brahman, for God is ultimately a person. God is the Supreme Proprietor, and we are His sons or servants. Therefore let us all engage ourselves in the service of the Lord, as recommended in the *Bhagavadgita*. The actual identity of every living creature is that he is the eternal servant of God. The ocean and the minute particle of water have the same quality, but the quantity of salt in the drop of water and the quantity of salt in the ocean are different. They are qualitatively one but quantitatively different. God has power, and you have power. But His is so great that yours cannot compare with it. If you say 'I am God' that is foolishness and ignorance. We are simultaneously one with and different from God.

For Bhaktivedanta, the goal of earthly life is to enter and live in Krishna-consciousness, an awareness of man's true nature as a small part of the Divine, and to thenceforth live in loving devotion and service to

Krishna, the Divine. The teachings of Bhaktivedanta and ISKCON thus stand in sharp contrast and opposition to those of most other contemporary Gurus who follow a strict Advaita or Monist approach and teach the total union of man and God, of the individual and ultimate reality.

The ISKCON movement, since the death of Bhaktivedanta, is currently embroiled in legal and other wrangles especially in America, which resemble in many respects the problems which split the Gaudiya Vaishnavas after the death of Bhaktisiddhanta. Yet despite such problems, the movement seems to have taken root, among both Westerners and to a lesser extent Indians, in a surprisingly strong and tenacious manner: strong perhaps not least because of the powerful emotional forces channelled into it by Bhaktivedanta's present-day disciples.

CHAPTER X

Muktananda and Gurumayi

From Churchgate station in the heart of Bombay one takes the suburban train north towards Virar, some fifty miles outside the centre, in the hills which bound Bombay's urban sprawl. The unrelenting concrete and human jungle gradually becomes interspersed with occasional green or barren expanses of wasteland, then across the Dahisar river areas of countryside and fields defiantly resist, at least for the moment, the ever-expanding urbanization of greater Bombay. From Vasai Road, close to the end of the line at Virar, an hour's bus ride will take you through a pleasantly green and hilly countryside to the small village of Ganeshpuri, which apart from a few houses, tea shops and a post office consists of assorted buildings on either side of the small main street which make up the Muktananda–Gurumayi Ashram.

The ashram is a well-ordered and well-run establishment, containing sufficient residential accommodation for the several hundreds of followers—particularly from America—who are to be found there at any one time. A large meditation hall, where chanting and hymn-singing regularly takes place, leads on to Muktananda's 'samadhi' or final resting-place; an open courtyard in front of this memorial, where formerly Muktananda and now Gurumayi preside over serried ranks of meditators and devotees, lead in turn to the inevitable bookshop and beyond it the eating area and large dining hall—beyond that again the many acres of garden, meditation halls and residential accommodation. It is a sizeable and imposing institution which reflects something of the prosperity it has attracted and continues to attract from abroad: aided, not least, in the past few years by having a young, attractive and charismatic girl—Gurumayi—to guide its fortunes. It has expanded considerably since I first visited and met Muktananda there a decade ago; and it is clear from the building activity currently in progress that it is still continuing to expand.

The teachings of Muktananda and his successor Gurumayi Chidvilasananda are based on a refined version of Kashmir Shaivism and lay a particularly strong emphasis on the role and importance of the Guru: without a Guru man has no hope or chance of gaining enlightenment. Muktananda's story therefore begins with his Guru, Nityananda, who after many years of wandering around India came to settle in the small village of Ganeshpuri, nestling in the hills some fifty miles to the north of Bombay. Nityananda was a highly solitary person; he spoke little, taught even less, and those who sought out his presence as an enlightened master would sit silently before him listening only to his peace and stillness. One such individual who sought him out was Muktananda. Born in 1908 near Mangalore, Muktananda—then known as Krishna—first met Nityananda when he was fifteen years old, and soon afterwards he left home, took vows as a and for the next twenty-five years wandered around India studying various schools of thought with a succession of teachers, meditating and practising different forms of Yoga. Under Nityananda's guidance over the next nine years, Muktananda underwent a number of intense meditational experiences—described in detail in his autobiography *Chitshakti Vilas* or the 'Play of Consciousness'—which culminated in achieving the ultimate state of self-realization: the realization that there was no distinction between himself and Nityananda, Nityananda and Shiva, the Absolute, Brahman. Some five years later, just before he died in 1961, Nityananda appointed Muktananda his successor in the lineage of Gurus. Muktananda's fame as an enlightened master grew; he received his first Western visitor in 1965 and first visited the West in 1970. Thereafter he paid three further visits to the West, founding a major ashram in South Fallsberg, New York State, which now publishes many of his works, along with some 600 other ashrams and centres around the world.

Muktananda knew virtually no English; much of the translation work, both of his books and of his utterances and discourses, was done by Malti, a young girl who had been first introduced to Muktananda and his teachings at the age of five and had since then devoted herself single-mindedly to follow him. Malti was initiated by Muktananda when still only fourteen years old; after leaving school she joined the ashram full-time and rapidly progressed both in her studies of Kashmir Shaivism and other philosophies and in other paths towards self-knowledge. In 1982 Muktananda gave Malti her vows as a together with the new name

of Swami Chidvilasananda; and a month afterwards he appointed her his successor in the Guru lineage. Later in that same year Muktananda died; and Chidvilasananda—more generally known as Gurumayi to her followers—has since then taken over the reins, basing herself at the ashram in Ganeshpuri—which is predominantly populated by Americans, but also has smaller numbers from especially Australia, New Zealand, the UK and France—for most of the year but generally spending some three months in the summer at South Fallsberg in the States.

The teachings of this lineage of Gurus are based on Kashmir Shaivism: that is to say, on a tradition of Shaiva philosophy which evolved predominantly in Kashmir around the ninth century AD and is expounded especially in the works of Vasugupta—notably the *Shiva-Sutras*—and Abhinavagupta. The teachings espouse not a Bhakti or devotional approach, but rather a philosophical and intuitive path to self-knowledge. At the centre and heart of the teaching is Shiva—the one Ultimate Reality, other than which, nothing else exists; in this respect the teaching is thoroughly Advaita or Non-Dual. Shiva is the absolute Lord, totally free, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and unlimited. Of His free will, Shiva manifests the world of diverse objects, the universe and man, out of His own Being: the world is therefore not separate from Him, or He from it. The way, and also the form, in which Shiva is manifest in the world is called Shakti or Power; Shakti is not separate from Shiva, but is as it were the creative energy of Shiva which gives rise to the creation. As creation evolves, it evolves into descending forms which gradually lose their consciousness of their undivided nature as Shiva, and instead evolve an awareness of being separate forms: an awareness of plurality in place of unity, of finiteness in place of infinity. So too man comes to identify himself with his finite form of the body, rather than with his true infinite nature as Shiva. Man also sees the world around him in the form of multiplicity, rather than in its proper form as an outpouring and manifestation of primordial unity. The aim of this teaching, therefore, is to awaken man to his true nature, to the true nature of the world, as none other than Self or Shiva; to break down his sense of individual 'I'-ness or ego, to realize the Self within him, and in doing so to realize the oneness of the Self and to identify with the Self or Shiva in all things. It is to become one with the universe, to become the universe.

The way in which man achieves this realization must come about initially through a form of spiritual awakening, which can only be brought

about by a Guru. The unawakened individual is incapable on his own of attaining the vision of the Infinite, of Shiva.

The Guru starts the process of awakening by Shaktipat—a dropping or fall of Shakti—whereby he conveys part of his own self-realized Shakti, and this awakens in the follower the Shakti lying dormant within him. This starts the process whereby the individual will come increasingly to recognize and identify with his inner Shakti which is ultimately, in its fullest form, none other than Shiva himself. When the Guru awakens Shakti in this way, it is a form of initiation or Diksha: thus the process is referred to by Muktananda as Shaktipat Diksha. The initial Diksha must be followed by both the development of intellectual knowledge through scriptural study, to gain better understanding of the theory, the method and the goal; and the development of meditation and inner knowledge or perception, in order to experience these within oneself and thereby to gain liberation and knowledge of the true Self. Very often at initiation the Guru will give the initiated a mantra: a syllable, word or phrase such as '*Om namah Shivaya*' (Praise be to Shiva) which the devotee will silently chant repeatedly as a way of focusing the mind and as an aid to raising the consciousness. Through the repeated chanting of the mantra, the devotee comes to absorb it, to concentrate fully on it and ultimately to identify with it: the mantra thus comes to liberate the person who chants it through a process by which the person 'becomes' the mantra, becomes the object of the mantra, or Shiva. Similarly, through initiation and awakening by the Guru, the disciple eventually comes to realize that he himself is the Guru, that there is ultimately no distinction between Guru and disciple: both Guru and disciple are in essence embodiments of Shakti, of Shiva. The Guru is God and the disciple is one who is on the path towards realizing his true nature as God. Once that state is achieved, it brings with it the realization that all is but a divine game as it were, a play of divine consciousness (Chitshakti, or Chaitanya): there is nothing which is not Shiva, outpouring of Himself to give rise to all that we see around us, immanent in all around. Awareness of this brings an inner tranquillity, a sense of joy and bliss, of love and compassion for all around.

Such in outline, is the essential teaching of this line of Gurus, which is liberally interspersed with quotations from such Maharashtrian mystical saints as Tukaram, Mirabai and Jnaneshwar. It embodies an undoubtedly logical system of thought, if the basic tenets and beliefs are accepted. Muktananda, and Gurumayi after him, have further expounded greatly on

the actual process of the awakening of Shakti by adding a number of Tantric theories. The process itself is called Siddha Yoga—the Yoga of the enlightened ones. The Shakti within oneself is termed Kundalini, and is centred in three areas: at the base of the spine, in the heart, and at the crown of the head. Shaktipat initiated by the Guru awakens Kundalini, and is centred in three areas: at the base of the spine, successive intense meditation moves this power gradually up through the body, through the various Chakras or centres of energy, ultimately to the thousand-petalled lotus at the crown of the head; when it reaches that point, it unites with and becomes one with the Supreme within, which resides in the form of a blue light—containing a Blue Being which is none other than Shiva—the radiance of the perfect knowledge of divine realization. He who realizes this, himself becomes a Siddha, and merges totally and individually with Shiva. In his autobiography Muktananda has described many of the experiences he had while Kundalini rose up through his body, following initiation by his Guru Nityananda. He started out by meditation on his Guru; gradually this developed into a form of identification with Nityananda, in which at times he felt fully one with him. He began to see his Guru everywhere. Then in his meditation he began to have visions of lights: first a radiant white ball of light which penetrated all the centres of energy in his body, then a soft red light shimmering all around him. At this stage too he relates that he began to adopt strange behaviour patterns: he would hop and jump around like a frog and would hiss like a snake, make a sound like a camel, and then roar like a tiger, even frightening the local cattle and people. He had less and less contact with people, and became increasingly withdrawn, and was for a while profoundly troubled by very strong penile erections: troubles which he overcame only when he read in a book that this was part of a process in which the semen must be drawn up through the various Chakras of the body to gain enlightenment. The vision of lights persisted, first red, then white, then yellow and black; he would also see events in the world, or visit pilgrimage centres in his visions. He saw a beautiful baby boy in a cradle, and was convinced it was Krishna; then he visited other worlds—the moon ('It is quite true that there is a world in the moon. The people living in it are all the same age. Looking at the towns there, I observed that there must be neither rain nor hot sun. All the houses were made of gold and silver'), the realm and god of death, Yama ('I saw a black god sitting on a dark water buffalo; the god wore a red dhoti, a sacred thread, and a

jewelled crown on his head. He was about ten feet away from me') and the realm of the god Indra ('One day in meditation I visited a great city. I saw in the distance a chariot coming towards me: the chariot approached me and stopped, and a god in human form stepped out. From the outside, the chariot looked about ten feet square, but once inside, I saw it was very big and furnished with everything one would need. There was water, a small bathroom and several bedrooms'). Finally came the vision of the Blue Pearl, accompanied by sweet music; through its help he visited the world of the Siddhas where he saw Nityananda in their company; then within the Blue Pearl he saw a Blue Person, none other than Shiva, the Blue Lord, and came to realize that this was his inner Self.

Muktananda's experiences were quite clearly framed, determined and expressed in his own preconceptions and Hindu outlook. The path he followed and described is very largely that set out in Kashmir Shaivism and Tantra; his insistence on having a Guru is based on his own need for a Guru—perhaps also on his own bewilderment and panic at times when he did not understand his experiences until a Guru pointed him towards a particular Hindu text which could set it in an acceptable theoretical context. Like Guru, like disciple: Gurumayi has also described her own experiences in terms of seeing lights and visions; while other followers on receiving Shaktipat Diksha from Muktananda—often he would wave a bunch of peacock feathers over their head or strike them with it, a practice adopted also by Gurumayi—have gone running around the ashram grounds on all fours roaring like animals. A common reaction among followers—including that for example, of the British pop-singer and actress Lulu—is to dissolve into tears, often for hours or days on end, and there is little doubt that 'self-surrender' to this, as to other paths of the Gurus, can occasion a dramatic release of pent-up emotions and anxieties. There must however come a point in describing and rationalizing experiences of the type described by Muktananda where the description itself helps to shape and determine the experience. This by no means decries the validity of the experience, by no means denies that Muktananda or Gurumayi had visions of light: what it does is to raise the question over whether these experience have been interpreted accurately. It is here, of course, that one of the essential works of the Guru lies in Muktananda's and Gurumayi's tradition: for the Guru is there both to initiate the awakening of inner energy, and to interpret the followers' experiences in terms of that tradition, in terms of their set of beliefs.

Muktananda has similarly interpreted other religions in terms of Kashmir Shaivism and his own beliefs:

> Christ was God-incarnate, Muhammad was God-incarnate, Buddha was God-incarnate and you and I are God-incarnate. Whoever manifested from the Truth was God-incarnate. We all come out of the same light. Jesus was God-incarnate in a special way, because he had realized his oneness with God. All the great beings shared this characteristic. Nonetheless, everyone is born from God; everyone is an incarnation of God. When a person turns within to realize his own self, he becomes God. We should have the understanding that God is the same in all religions. In the true abode of God, only God exists, and He is completely pure and formless. People who believe in Krishna or Jesus can enter it only after they give up their feeling of belonging to Krishna or Jesus. No caste, religion, tradition or sect can reach that place of God. Once a human being reaches it, he is like a river merging in the ocean. He becomes one with the all-pervading Absolute. I do not belong to any religion. God accepts everyone, and every religion belongs to Him. The perfectly Non-Dual awareness of Shiva is available by Guru's grace, by the power of Nityananda, by the love of Shiva. We must worship, remember and understand Shiva by becoming Shiva. This is the path of Nityananda, the path given by the Guru. It is nothing new, it is not a sect or a cult, not the monopoly of a single people or a single land. It is the religion of all countries, all religions, all societies, all men.

On the plane of generalities, these are fine, stirring and appealing words. Yet once you start delving a little deeper into what Muktananda and Gurumayi are teaching, it is quite clear that what they are teaching is a religion, a sect, a tradition—the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. Furthermore, as in the case of Advaita Vedanta as taught by Chinmayananda and others, there is clearly no way in which the philosophies of Absolute Monism or Non-Dualism in which the individual soul or Self is God, can be said to be equated with the Dualistic teachings of Jesus, Muhammad or the Krishna Bhaktas, in which, however close the relationship between the individual soul and God, the two are never identical with each other and there always remains some degree of separation between them. The

only way to achieve a synthesis it to subordinate the one to the other, the Dualist to the Monist, and claim that Christianity and Islam, for example, were only partially true and represent stages on the path to ultimate Monism; yet this is in effect to deny these religions, to deny what they claim and what they teach. The path of Muktananda and Gurumayi, as pursued in their ashrams around the world, is one of chanting '*Om namah Shivaya*' of performing a very Hindu form of arati or offering fire to the deity, and studying such Hindu texts as the *Shiva Sutras*, expounded in Ganeshpuri by a German scholar with a doctorate in Sanskrit—in which the path and the goal of these Gurus is set out. It is also the path of devoting and subordinating oneself to the Guru, and of the supremacy and divinity of the Guru, without whom nothing can be attained. This again was felt strongly by Muktananda through his own experiences, and is expressed strongly by him in his writings:

> The Supreme Principle is not something one attains by doing Sadhana in the right place at the right time. One does not have to undergo any kind of difficulty to attain God. Through Siddha Yoga, one automatically attains the principle of the Self. Siddha Yoga is effortless and simple. On the Siddha path, one needs a Guru who has been chosen by another Siddha of the true lineage of Siddhas. He must have complete knowledge and be proficient at transmitting energy and removing all obstacles. Forgetfulness of one's true nature is the mass of ignorance which muddies the experience of the Self. The Guru is the means of removing it. Siddha Yoga is not a Guru cult. But in every field one needs a guide. On the spiritual path too, a Guru is necessary. The Guru is not merely a human being but an eternal principle, the power of grace. Because the Guru is the being in which God's power resides, he is worshipped as God. It's the Guru's Shakti, rather than the individual, which is the Guru. That Shakti is transmitted by the Guru, awakens the disciple's own inner Shakti called Kundalini, and thus gives the disciple the experience of the expansion of consciousness. For the awakening of Kundalini, the grace of Shri Guru is essential. For many lifetimes we have been trapped in worldliness: only the Guru can release us. You can find the narrow path only with the help of a Guru: only a Guru can give you inner meditation. Without the power of the Guru's grace, meditation cannot take

> place. Bathe in the radiance of the Guru's Self. Come to him and be immersed in his experience of oneness. Guru, Self and God are one and the same and therefore love for the Guru is love for the Self. When a disciple truly loses himself to the Guru, he does not have to do any other spiritual practices, because the Guru's knowledge arises within him on its own. When a disciple surrenders himself to the Guru, the Guru takes full responsibility for his progress. The Guru guarantees that he will lead the disciple to the goal. All attainments come from obeying the Guru.

So too for Gurumayi: 'For the knowledge of Self, for realization of the Self, it is necessary to have a Guru. To obtain complete knowledge in your daily life, you need a living Guru.'

Again this is given a sound philosophical and theoretical basis in the Kashmir Shaiva belief that the Guru or Siddha is himself Shakti, God, and can awaken the Shakti in others; if you accept the theory, then the practice follows naturally from that. And if the Guru assures you that both he and you are God, and promises to give you realization of this by an effortless and simple method, there are bound to be many who will wish to try this out. It is also a philosophy which does not demand renunciation of the world: for just as Shiva has entered the world as Shakti, so the task is to perceive the form of Shakti in oneself and in the world, while still carrying on our everyday tasks in the world. Again, an effortless and simple addition to everyday life.

The teachings of Muktananda and Gurumayi represent a combination of an exposition of Kashmir Shaivism with what appears to many outsiders as a strange admixture of such phenomena as seeing coloured lights, imagining oneself as various animals and travelling to the worlds of Indra and other gods. They also lay a strong emphasis on the need for a Guru, who acts both as a focus for emotional needs and as a prop to unlock the devotee's inner spirituality and advise on what to do. Like teacher, like devotee: as Muktananda has said, one finds a Guru who is like oneself, one accepts a Guru according to one's own nature.

CHAPTER XI

Aurobindo, the Mother and Auroville

Pondicherry, a small coastal enclave some hundred miles to the south of Madras, remained under French rule from 1699 right up to 1954. Throughout the period of British rule in India, Pondicherry served as a refuge for those like Aurobindo Ghose who were actively opposed to British rule and who for political reasons needed to flee to a realm beyond the reach of British law and authority. Somewhat separated historically from the rest of India, Pondicherry even today retains a very distinctively French flavour; many of the street names are still in French—like Rue Dumas, Rue Victor Simonel, Boulevard du Sud and Rue de la Caserne—and are lined with boulangeries and patisseries baking traditional croissants and French loaves. The bicycle, everywhere on hire by the hour or day, remains the most convenient means of transport for exploring the town's well-laid-out streets and by-ways. One could at times be forgiven for thinking that French rule in Pondicherry had never ended: for the town receives a constant stream of French visitors and French speakers, they come not to visit a relic of empire but in the main to pay homage to the shrine of Aurobindo, freedom-fighter-turned-Guru, and his principal (French) disciple now commonly referred to as simply 'the Mother'. The Aurobindo ashram seems now almost the mainstay and *raison d'etre* of Pondicherry itself; it is housed in numerous buildings spread throughout the town, and even more numerous ashram guest-houses cater for the large and constant influx of visitors and devotees from abroad. Aurobindo's vision of a new humanity united in its attempt to attain the divine finds physical expression in Auroville, a new township development a few miles outside Pondicherry, where individuals from many countries of the world have come to settle in an attempt to form a community united in its objective of forming a nucleus of a new de-nationalized society based on acquisition not of goods or things but of spirituality, of divine fellowship. A positive and more

enduring variant on the 1960s hippie drop-out theme, Auroville still struggles to arise from the surrounding sand and jungle; but the ashram in the town, with its focus at the shrines to Aurobindo and the Mother on Rue de la Marine, continues to attract large numbers who follow the teachings of a Guru who on several occasions came close to being condemned to death by the British for his revolutionary activities.

'Shri' Aurobindo, as he is often referred to (Shri being an honorific title equivalent to 'Mr') was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872, the youngest of three sons. His mother, Swarnalata Devi, was the daughter of Rajnarayan Bose who was an ardent proponent of the Bengal Renaissance and nationalism, urging anglicized Bengalis to turn towards their own culture and customs. His father, Dr Krishna Dhan Ghose, was a practising doctor who had been trained at Aberdeen University and whose views were diametrically opposed to those of his father-in-law. He determined that his sons should have a thoroughly European upbringing; at home they spoke not Bengali but English and Hindustani, and Aurobindo's full name—Aurobindo/Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose—itself is evidence of his father's wish to anglicize his son (Miss Ackroyd was an English family friend present when the child was named). In 1877 the three sons were sent to the Loreto Convent School in Darjeeling, run by Irish nuns; two years later, when Aurobindo was seven, Krishna Dhan took them to England for their education. For the next five years Aurobindo and his brothers lived with a Congregational minister, Rev. William Drewett, in Manchester where he was taught at home by Mrs Drewett and, on the strict instructions of his father, had no contact whatever with any Indian influence. It was in Croydon, England in 1880 that the Ghoses had their fourth son, Barin. From Manchester, Aurobindo went in 1884 to St. Paul's School in London, where he excelled himself in Classics and Literature; then in 1890 he went to Kings College, Cambridge with a classical scholarship. After two years he passed the first part of the tripos examination, winning prizes also for Greek and Latin verse. In 1890 he had also passed the Open Competition for the Indian Civil Service, but he subsequently disqualified himself from being accepted by failing to appear for the near-obligatory riding test; but by his early Cambridge days he was already a strong proponent of Indian nationalism and independence, and his speeches on the subject may well have influenced Lord Kimberley, then Secretary of State for India, to close Aurobindo's application file with the comment that Mr Ghose would probably not be

a desirable addition to the Service. Instead Aurobindo was introduced in London to the Gaekwad or Maharaja of Baroda who offered him a post; and in 1893 Aurobindo abandoned Cambridge and returned to India at the age of twenty. He subsequently spent some thirteen years in Baroda State Service: during the first half of this period he did various administrative jobs in the Survey Settlement Department, the Stamp and Revenue Department and the Secretariat, while during the second half he served in Baroda College as Professor of English and later Vice-Principal. During these years he also learned Sanskrit, Bengali and other Indian languages alongside developing a knowledge of Indian history and culture which had been denied to him in his early upbringing. In 1901 he married Mrinalini Bose; yet they rarely lived together, and Aurobindo would frequently write explaining that his work and mission in life must come first. Mrinalini died in 1918 while travelling to Pondicherry to meet Aurobindo.

During his Baroda years, Aurobindo had isolated and disparate spiritual experiences. Once for example, he believed that he saw the spirits of his dead father and others, summoned during a seance organized by his brother; on other occasions he felt a Being of Light in him who helped avert an accident while he was travelling in a carriage in Baroda, he perceived an electric power around his head through practising control of breathing, and he experienced the living presence of the goddess Kali when he visited a temple. However, although these were indicative of a growing openness on the part of Aurobindo to receive and perceive such experiences, they seem to have had no abiding influence over the course of his life.

Meanwhile Aurobindo had also been involving himself in the largely underground movement for Indian independence, writing the occasional article, joining a secret revolutionary society in Bombay in 1900, and attending Congress sessions. Following the partition of his native Bengal in 1905, Aurobindo involved himself increasingly actively in the Independence movement, attending and speaking at conferences and rallies and urging complete independence without compromise. In 1906 he left Baroda to become President of the new National College in Calcutta (later to become Jadavpur University); at the same time he became editor of the newly founded newspaper *Bande Mataram*, in which role he narrowly avoided being prosecuted for publishing a seditious article the following year. At the end of 1907, after attending the Surat

Congress, he stayed for three days with a Yogi named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, under whose guidance he gained what he described as an Advaita experience of the world as Absolute Brahman. Returning to his teaching and other activities in Calcutta, he would stay from time to time with his brother Barin who had set up a centre for studying the *Gita* and making terrorist bombs. In 1908, following a bomb-throwing incident in which an English lady and her daughter were killed (meant for a Calcutta magistrate), Aurobindo and others were arrested and put in Alipur Jail pending trial. While in jail, Aurobindo had what he later described as a vision of the omnipresent Godhead, in the form of Krishna-Vasudeva-Narayan (Vishnu) present in everyone and everything around him; and he spent much of his time reading Hindu scriptures and practising Yoga. At his trial one year later, presided over by an English contemporary of his in Classics at Kings, Aurobindo was acquitted and immediately sought to revive the flagging Nationalist movement, publishing two weekly newspapers to propound the message that freedom was India's Sanatana Dharma or eternal right and destiny. This Sanatana Dharma, according to Aurobindo, encompassed the spiritual as well as political and social uplifting of the nation; a spiritual revolution would itself give India the strength needed to realize her freedom, unity and greatness. But his call found few to answer; and with the police on their way to arrest him again and close the newspaper, Aurobindo fled in February 1910 to French-ruled Chandernagore—in response to a voice he heard within him—and thence two months later to Pondicherry. There he remained until his death on 5 December, 1950, increasingly devoted to his spiritual work and practices. After four years of Yoga and writing attended only by four or five close disciples, in 1914 he began publication of a philosophical monthly magazine *The Arya* in collaboration with a French writer, Paul Richard and his wife, Mirra. The Richards had to return to France at the start of the First World War, but Mirra returned to India in 1920 and thereafter never left. Aurobindo never fully abandoned his comments on political life; he claimed that he used his yogic powers to oppose Hitler and the Japanese, and on India's independence in 1947 his message for her spiritual destiny was broadcast on All-India Radio. However, from the end of 1926 he effectively withdrew from contact with the world and even with his disciples, devoting himself totally for the rest of his life to Yoga, spiritual practices and writing. All the rest, the running of the ashram and guidance of disciples, he placed in the hands of Mirra,

who came to be known as the Mother.

Mirra was born in Paris in 1878, the daughter of Turkish-born banker, Maurice Alfassa and Egyptian-born, Mathilde Ismaloun who had emigrated from Egypt to France in 1877. She was educated mainly at home, and later at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Around the age of twelve she had a series of psychic experiences which convinced her of the possibility of man uniting with God and manifesting Him on earth; later, around 1904, she spent two years with a Polish-Jewish occultist at Tlemcen in Algeria, and on her return to Paris she gave talks to spiritualist groups and gathered her own group of disciples. When she first met Aurobindo in 1914, in the company of her second husband Paul Richard, she saw in him the Master who had been inwardly guiding her all along. Leaving after some months, she spent the war years first in France and then predominantly in Japan, from where she wrote occasionally to Aurobindo. When she returned to Pondicherry in 1920, with her marriage to Paul Richard coming to an end, she soon took charge of organizing and managing both the house where they were living and the rapidly increasing number of disciples coming to visit. It was under her guidance that the originally small community in Pondicherry was organized—against Aurobindo's original intentions—into an ashram which today caters for some 2,800 residents living in buildings scattered throughout the town. It was she who founded the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1952, where children from nursery to advanced levels learn by themselves, choose their own subjects and progress at their own pace. And it was she too who, in collaboration with the International Sri Aurobindo Society, founded Auroville in 1968 as an international community of peace and progressive harmony where the traditions of all countries would be represented and from which the inhabitants would learn of the underlying unity behind appearances and work towards the advent of the new species of man that was Aurobindo's vision. Mirra died in 1973; but the ashram continues to attract a large and constant flow of visitors from around the world, particularly from France, while Auroville struggles on with a resident international population of 900.

Aurobindo's thought and teaching is often verbose, convoluted and involved; but the main structure in his teaching is relatively straightforward and is presented especially in his monumental work, *The Life Divine*. Aurobindo posits a number of levels of consciousness. The

highest Reality, the Divine, is termed by Aurobindo *Sat-cit-ananda*: existence-consciousness-bliss. In places he also terms it Brahman; it is 'the transcendent and incommunicable, the Supra-cosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is also the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity is an eternal portion of the Ishwara (Lord); it is His supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings. The Brahman alone is, and because of It all are, for all are the Brahman'. *Cit,* or consciousness-force, is also termed the Divine Mother, 'the original supreme Shakti who stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme'; she is a 'mediatory principle between the human personality and the Divine Nature'. By a process of involution, the Divine has involved itself in matter, abiding within it yet remaining totally transcendent to it; matter is consequently as real as spirit, and manifests Divine activity on earth. But parallel to this descent of Spirit into matter, there is a complementary ascent or evolution of matter into Spirit through mind. Mind is for Aurobindo the vehicle which is so far the most highly evolved stage in the evolution of matter towards *Sat-cit-ananda*. Mind has evolved from Matter, Life and Psyche; and it is destined to evolve further into Super-mind. Super-mind is the intermediary stage between the human mind and the Divine; it is a Supra-Mental principle of knowledge which retains the real truth of existence, the truth of omniscience of the Supreme Reality, and is at the same time the consummation of mind. When mind evolves into Super-mind, the Divine is manifest on earth and endows the conquest of death and earthly immortality; and the individual evolves into a gnostic being, the spirit shines through matter, and there comes into being in the world a life unity, a mental unity and a spiritual oneness. But this can only be made possible by a two-way process: mind must of itself, through Yoga and meditation, reach out towards the Supra-Mental and then in turn the Divine Shakti will descend to rend the veil between mind and Super-mind, enabling the Super-mind's descent to earth. Aurobindo expands on the relation between mind and Super-mind by positing further levels of consciousness between the two: first Higher Mind, then successively Illumined Mind, Intuitive and Over-mind, before finally the Super-mind is reached. Higher Mind is a clarity of spirit, possessing a sense of unity of being but being characterized by thought and conceptual knowledge. Illumined Mind is where spiritual light, truth and power enter the

consciousness by way of vision rather than thought; Intuitive Mind attains direct knowledge not based on reason or sense-experience. Over-mind sees the universe as essentially one, yet composed of different aspects; and it is only in Super-mind that the full vision of Divine Unity is achieved. The evolution from matter to mind takes place through countless births and rebirths; and the path from mind towards Super-mind is one which can be followed only with the help of the Guide, Master or Guru.

'The Guru is a man helping his brothers, a light kindling other lights, an awakened Soul awakening other souls. The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example, but by a power to communicate his own experience to others. A strict obedience to the wise and intuitive leading of a Guide is normal and necessary for all but a few especially gifted seekers. The perils (on the path) have been met by imposing the necessity of initiation, of discipline, of methods of purification and testing by ordeal, of an entire submission to the directives of the path-finder or path-leader, one who has realized the Truth and himself possesses and is to communicate the light, the experience, a guide who is strong to take by the hand and carry over difficult passages as well as to instruct and point the way.'

Aurobindo was indeed such a guide and Guru to the extent that he claimed to have perceived and realized the Truth, the secret of the hierarchy of consciousness, and was there as the Master to instruct and point the way for others.

Most of Aurobindo's major works, including *The Life Divine*, were written during his first ten years in Pondicherry. He worked increasingly not so much to ascend to the Divine but to bring the Divine down into matter. As early as 1911 he wrote:

> I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane and I am now able to put myself into men and change them . . . I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts. . . . My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers.

On 24 November 1926 there occurred what Aurobindo described as

'the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the Supra-Mental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Over-mind Godhead, preparing the descent of the Super-mind and Ananda (Bliss).' It was following this descent of the Over-mind that Aurobindo withdrew into total seclusion to prepare for and hasten the coming of the Super-mind. He evidently saw in this process something of a battle between light and darkness; for when he broke his right knee in 1938 be commented: 'The hostile forces have tried many times to prevent things like the Darshan, but I have succeeded in warding off all their attacks. I didn't think the hostiles would attack me: that was my mistake. Of course, I accept it as a part of the battle.' When he used his powers in the Second World War, he explained that he was backing the Divine against the threatened reign of the asura (demon), and described how he was influencing the decisions of various generals. When he died without achieving his goal of bringing down the Super-mind, Mirra announced that when she asked him to resuscitate, he refused and said that he would manifest again in the first Supra-Mental body. Then on 29 February 1956 Mirra announced that the Super-mind had indeed descended with Supra-Mental light, force and consciousness. Subsequently she wrote in 1958:

> The supra-mental substance is now almost everywhere spread in earth's atmosphere, preparing for the emergence of intermediaries and supermen. As the beginnings of the supra-mental life, which is next to be realized in the evolution of the universe, are developing, not perhaps in an apparent but a sure manner, it appears more and more evident that the most difficult means of approach to this supramental life is intellectual activity.

Later, in 1969, she wrote:

> Since the beginning of this year a new consciousness is at work upon earth to prepare man for a new creation, the Superman. We are attending on the birth of a new world.

Aurobindo's self-expression in his books is often enchantingly poetic, intellectually thought-provoking, frequently self-contradictory and falling into the trap of supposing that because a word exists it must denote

an actually-existing concept separate from that denoted by any other word. Aurobindo's thought is based not so much on his own personal or mystical experience as on a hotch-potch of ideas culled from Hinduism, Occultism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism and assorted other Western philosophies. It is particularly heavily indebted to the teachings of Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy, both in its structural content and in its approach to truth through a knowledge of the various hierarchies of consciousness. Aurobindo's teaching is an attempted synthesis of Eastern and Western in which he seems to have only a partial understanding of each, particularly of the various systems of Indian philosophy; and it is primarily a reasoned philosophy based on the parallel assumptions of evolution-involution and of the ascending and descending layers or levels of consciousness. It is a system propounded by one who felt chosen for the task, and who in 1905 had written to his wife:

> I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race with the power of knowledge. This is not a feeling within me, it is not of recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow; God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.

His very rational and mind-based approach betrays the strong influence of his English education and conversely, the weak influence of Indian ideas of going beyond mind to experience Reality; this raises in turn a relevant question over what he actually experienced during his three days with Vishnu Lele and his year in Alipore Jail, experiences which seem to have made no marked impression at the time on either his outlook or his subsequent behaviour. Yet Aurobindo was, and remains for vast numbers, a Guru whose words are sifted in an attempt to synthesize and understand them, and to seek a reality underlying them. Yet if Aurobindo could never find experience and merge with the Divine of which he wrote so much, this might of itself suggest that it got submerged and swamped under his welter of words which, as Mirra perhaps suspected towards the end, acted as an intellectual barrier to the actual experience. And if Aurobindo, from his vision, could not attain the ultimate experience, what hope now for his disciples who are still struggling to get to grips with his vision?

CHAPTER XII

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

The Ganga, most sacred of Indian rivers, starts its life as a small stream way up in the snowy fastness of the Himalayas. From there, fed by numerous tributaries, it tumbles and eventually roars its way down through mountain gorges and ravines, until it finds its way into the great north Indian plain at the holy city of Haridwar, whence it wends its swift and majestic passage across a thousand miles to merge its waters with those of the Bay of Bengal in present-day Bangladesh. The Ganga has long been revered and respected by Hindus; its banks are thronged with pilgrims seeking to dip into its purifying waters and pay homage to its greatness, and innumerable sages and holy men have across the ages set up their hermitages and ashrams close to its shores to meditate on its might and beauty. The small town of Rishikesh, a short distance upstream from Haridwar and at the point where the river emerges from the mountains, is a particularly holy place of pilgrimage and has long been a spot chosen by sages and Gurus to settle and set up their ashrams. Here, on both sides of the river, are to be found a great many temples and ashrams, frequented by wandering sadhus, ascetics, holy men and tourists. Among these, set slightly apart from and beyond the others, is the original ashram of the giggling, flower-bearing Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, once made famous in the 1960s by a stream of well-known names and faces which included the Beatles. Nowadays, however, the Rishikesh ashram is closed to casual visitors, and the Maharishi himself is more likely to be found either at one of his international centres abroad—such as those in the Netherlands, the UK, the USA, Switzerland, Kenya, Brazil or Australia—or increasingly at his 'World Capital of the Age of Enlightenment' at Maharishi Nagar, a short distance outside Delhi reached through mushrooming newly-developing suburbs and across a dusty wind-swept plain.

The Maharishi is curiously and determinedly reticent about revealing details of himself and his early life. The foreword to his principal 1963

work, *Science of Being and Art of Living*, which was added to the 1988 edition by Deepak Chopra, one of his leading disciples and President of the Maharishi Ayurveda Association of America, sets the scene which characterizes most accounts of the Maharishi and his teaching:

> Thirty years ago, a great man began to change the trend of time. Out of the Himalayas, His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi brought the teachings of Transcendental Meditation, teaching it as 'one solution to all problems'. Because it is simple, natural and universal, the TM program rapidly spread throughout the world and attracted millions of people. More than 350 scientific studies conducted at 160 independent universities and research institutions have proven that TM deserves its place as the world's most effective and popular program for developing full potential.

The surprising lack of biographical detail about the early years of the Maharishi—even in his authorized 'biography' entitled *Thirty Years around the World*—and his own determined silence on the subject raises an immediate doubt about one who comes from a tradition where it is customarily essential to establish the antecedents and bona fide nature of your teacher before you accept him as your Guru. Be that as it may, it would in fact be more accurate—if less poetic—to say that the Maharishi was born around 1918 into a Vaishya family in Uttar Pradesh in northern India, and studied at Allahabad University where he seems to have been most noted for his swimming ability. At Allahabad he studied physics: a training which has subsequently characterized much of his teaching, particularly his attempts to synthesize the teaching of Advaita Vedanta with the Western sciences. It was while he was in Allahabad, around 1941 when he was about twenty-three years old, that he met the man who was to be his Guru, Brahmananda Saraswati, who had been appointed the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math in the Himalayas. The Shankaracharayas represent the most continuous and established *Guru-shishya parampara*, or line of Guru-disciple succession, in India today. They derive their succession from the Advaita or Monist teacher Shankara; who originally set up four of his disciples to succeed him in his teachings in each of the four corners of India. Their successors (now more than four in number) and their religious centres nowadays constitute in many respects the cornerstones of Hindu orthodoxy and tradition, and remain highly

respected figures within the Hindu establishment. It was thus at the feet of such a Guru that the Maharishi received his lengthy spiritual upbringing; and much as he may claim that his Transcendental Meditation or TM is a purely secular invention of his own, it becomes in fact very evident that both TM itself and the background against which the Maharishi increasingly sets it owes much to his orthodox and strict Advaita training.

The Maharishi spent some thirteen years with Brahmananda Saraswati in the Himalayas. In 1953 Brahmananda Saraswati died, and his nominee Swami Shantanand Saraswati was appointed in his place to succeed him as Shankaracharya. At this point the Maharishi decided to leave Jyotir Math, and he spent the next two years in the 'Valley of the Saints' high up in the hills of Uttar Kashi. At the start of 1955 he then left the Himalayas and travelled to Rameshwaram in south India: this began what turned into a successful lecture-tour of the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which the Maharishi subsequently extended over the following two years to other parts of India. The year 1957 was in a sense his landmark year when he first propounded 'Transcendental Meditation' to an Indian audience; and on 1 January 1958, at the culmination of a 'Seminar of Spiritual Luminaries' which he organized in Madras, he formally launched his Spiritual Regeneration Movement through the vehicle of TM. He had up until now been referred to as Maharshi Bala Brahmachari Mahesh Yogi Maharaj ('the great sage and young renunciant, great lord, yogin and great king'); but, perhaps in reflection of his degree of success in India, between 1958 and 1964 he undertook five world tours, during which his titles were abbreviated and simplified into Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. During this period he paid a number of short visits to India, and it was in the course of one of these that he founded, on 20 April 1961, the Rishikesh Academy of Meditation. It was this initial round of world tours which effectively launched his fame in the West; and as the Maharishi centres have flourished and expanded throughout the world, so throughout the subsequent decades he continued to traverse the globe propounding Transcendental Meditation, returning only in recent years to spend the greater proportion of his time in India.

The Maharishi presents Transcendental Meditation as a harmonization between the teachings of the Vedic Rishis and that of contemporary Western scientific thought. Throughout his writings and sayings he presents his thoughts in purely Western terms, which of course makes

them more readily accessible to and understandable by a Western audience: but they are unmistakably Advaita in origin. He starts from the premise that Being—for which one should read Brahman—is the unmanifested reality of all that exists: it is the ultimate reality of all that was, is or will be, the sole ultimately existing reality, the living presence of God other than which nothing else exists. Being/Brahman is the source of all nature and natural laws; just as science is discovering infinitely subtler layers of energy, so Being/Brahman underlies the subtlest layer of all that existence, the essential constituent of all relative life. For the Maharishi, it is the discovery that Being/Brahman is the essential constituent of creation which allows the individual to gain the status of unlimited cosmic existence.

How, then, can the individual attain to such a discovery? The Maharishi teaches, following the well-trodden Upanishadic path, that this omnipresent Being/Brahman, the supreme lord of the universe, resides in everyone and everything but has hidden its nature behind the scenes. In particular, while it constitutes the basic nature of the mind, nonetheless the mind commonly remains in tune with the senses, turning its attention outside itself, and thereby failing to appreciate its own essential nature. All activity starts with thought, with the mind: and thinking has at its root transcendental Being/Brahman. Being/Brahman thus lies at the root of all creation: and if man can perceive and harmonize with this root of his own being, he can both glorify all fields of his life and infuse the nature of Being/Brahman into all the different fields of his activity and behaviour. Being/Brahman is not only the basis for all living, but by extension the basis of all laws of nature, of cosmic law (for which one may read Dharma); the evolutionary laws of nature or of science are a manifestation of unchanging cosmic law, which is itself the law of Being/Brahman. Being/Brahman can be experienced as the ultimate reality by the mind, when led to the subtlest limit of experience. For the mind is a wave of the ocean of Being/Brahman, which in turn produces Karma or action. By halting action, and by stilling the mind, the individual can ultimately arrive at the state of Being/Brahman, the field of eternal life. Having arrived at and experienced Being/Brahman, the mind becomes familiar with that transcendental state of consciousness, and can thereafter—when it returns to the field of relative experience—accomplish actions which reflect its now much higher state of consciousness. Thus the mind, enlightened through such a transcendental form of meditation, can effect

positive and powerful changes over day-to-day practical life in the world. It is the process of the mind starting conscious activity from the source of thought which infuses the power of Being/Brahman into the field of Karma or action, and which thereby infuses the individual also with the absolute bliss and happiness of eternal Being/Brahman.

As the Maharishi says, his Science of Being—which is an updated version of Advaita Vedanta—is a practical science in which every individual can experience the state of Being or Brahman and create in his life greater success in all fields of activity. His method to achieve this is through 'Transcendental Meditation'—a type of meditation which aims to transcend thought by selecting particular thoughts and following them back to their origin and source, which is the field of Being or Brahman. For thoughts start at the deepest level of consciousness, and thence travel through the depths of the mind before reaching conscious levels: so by returning to the source, one can gain a state of transcendental consciousness. Thus, by calming the mind, and sifting out and tracing back each thought as it arises, the mind can reach its source of creative intelligence and arrive at the state of transcendental Being or Brahman.

What thought, then, should an individual choose, to trace back to its origin? The Maharishi says that, since each individual is different, each will need to choose a different thought—and the particular thought or word to start which can only be selected for the individual by one specially trained in TM. It is, furthermore, only the trained TM teacher who can monitor an individual's progress, tell him how to experience the subtle states of thinking, and analyse, check and evaluate his thoughts. Personal instruction and guidance are central to the TM method. It is this trainer who, in initiating the individual before a shrine to the Maharishi's Guru Brahmananda Saraswati, will give the individual his particular mantra—a word or phrase which is the tool he thereafter uses to hold the mind's attention, to bring the mind back when it wanders off on other thoughts, and to help focus the mind in order to disassociate itself from passing thoughts and to turn in ever deeper upon itself. From this point on, the individual must meditate for at least two periods of twenty minutes each day, morning and evening, in order to realize its efficacy and benefits, and in order ultimately to attain the state of Being.

In a sense, that is all there is to it: a simple theory, and a simple method. It is the Maharishi's method, painless and relatively undemanding, whereby man can become God, and thence start to create heaven on earth.

TM is surrounded by a plethora of scientific and pseudo-scientific 'proofs' claiming to demonstrate the effectiveness of the method in improving health, increasing energy, eliminating stress and expanding mental potential. And there is little doubt that the method itself, the performance of meditation and the quietening of the mind, both can and have proved to be beneficial for a great many people. What is more questionable is whether, through this method, the mind actually merges into the state of Being or Brahman, and as the Maharishi claims, transforms the individual into a vehicle of God-consciousness. For the method is only part of the story for the Maharishi. The direct and simple method of TM aims to transform human consciousness into divine consciousness, and to transform the individual into God: at the same time it links him in God-consciousness with others who have attained the same goal, and opens the way for him to reflect this divine consciousness throughout creation. The ultimate aim, for the Maharishi, is not merely for the individual to become enlightened, but for him to use this enlightenment to create a new society of God-conscious individuals on earth—to create a heaven on earth. The God-conscious individual will, of his nature, perform good actions, in harmony with cosmic law, and, not being attached to such actions, not be bound by their effects; he will thereby escape from the effects of Karma and from the wheel of rebirth. By cultivating the art of thinking, speaking, acting and behaving in a right manner in accordance with God-consciousness, the individual both exerts a beneficial influence over those around him and over the society in which he lives, and also brings to himself such benefits as good health, long life and absence of mental stress.

It is from this point on that the Maharishi has evolved from an expounder and teacher of Advaita into a would-be founder of a new world order and society—a path to be trodden later also by Rajneesh. In 1970 the Maharishi developed his 'Science of Being' (namely Advaita Vedanta) into the 'Science of Creative Intelligence', expounding that the pure consciousness of Being was a manifestation of pure intelligence, which should be a subject of legitimate scientific study—this pure intelligence being revealed both in the Vedas and in 'unified quantum field theories'. To undertake this task, he founded in 1971 the Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa, USA. Its central objective was to study and analyse 'scientifically' the effects of both TM and his latest advanced TM-Siddhi technique, the chief feature of which was to endow

the meditator with the ability to fly through the air (a Siddhi is traditionally a power gained through the performance of ascetic practices, generally regarded in the Indian tradition as a side-effect of asceticism which should not be taken seriously lest it become a hindrance to the real goal of union with the Absolute).

In 1975 the Maharishi inaugurated the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment which he decreed was just commencing; he also established the International Capital of the Age of Enlightenment at Seelisberg in Switzerland (which has since been demoted to the Maharishi European Research University), and the following year he set up the World Government of the Age of Enlightenment as a 'non-political, non-religious organization' which nonetheless had its own ministers and ministries and would dictate how the world should be run based on the visions of 'enlightened' TM practitioners. He also propounded the 'Maharishi Effect', whereby he claims that if even one per cent of a city's population practises TM, this will result in a dramatic drop in crime, accidents and sickness; similar claims are advanced that when groups of meditators have travelled to the world's trouble-spots, there has immediately been a reduction of violence in those areas, thus proving the efficacy of TM. Among the Maharishi's more recent ventures has been the setting up in 1985 of the Maharishi Vedic University in Washington DC, to teach his brand of 'Vedic Science'; and his latest incursion has been into the area of Ayurveda, the traditional homoeopathic herbal remedy system in India, which he claims can provide perfect collective health for societies throughout the world, and for which he established in 1976 the Maharishi World Centre for Ayurveda alongside the Maharishi World Capital for the Age of Enlightenment at Maharishi Nagar in India.

All of these ventures have of course cost money; and this is a commodity not lacking in the Maharishi's movement. The Maharishi method of meditation may be simple, but it is not free or even cheap; during the 1960s it cost a would-be meditator a week's wages to be initiated and given a mantra, and although the cost has not been kept at that level, it is still a not-inconsiderable amount to pay for what most Gurus offer free. Maharishi literature is similarly glossy and expensive, as are his Ayurvedic medicines and potions; and he has most recently been appealing in the press for bankers and construction companies to invest in his latest twelve billion dollar scheme to develop infrastructure and housing for over 200,000 families in agriculturally and minerally rich

areas of unspecified developing countries, under the aegis of the Maharishi Heaven on Earth Development Corporation Ltd. TM, with its avowed aim of helping the individual to realize his divine nature, has become a major money-spinner under the guidance of the giggling Maharishi—giggling, one might say, all the way to the bank.

It is not least on the supposed 'non-religious' nature of TM—as claimed by many TM practitioners—that the Maharishi has laid himself open to criticism. TM is based on a very Advaita or Monist approach, in which the individual is, in essence, one with God, and has only to realize this identity in order to realize his full potential. This is made very clear by the Maharishi both in his Advaita interpretation of, and commentary on the *Bhagavadgita,* and in his *Science of Being* :

> God is omnipresent—the divine is present everywhere. This is the common understanding. God-realization is a positive concrete experience on the level of pure existence. Through Transcendental Meditation the mind is actually brought to this level, and the process is simple. The emphasis of all the scriptures of religions and of the whole field of metaphysics is that the state of self-realization or God-realization is the goal of man. Religion is a way to raise the consciousness of man to the level of God-consciousness, to raise the human mind to the level of divine intelligence or universal cosmic mind. It is a direct means of enabling human beings to evolve to the level of the Divine. A fully alive and integrated religion will be that in which every man is a man of realized God-consciousness, a man of full values of life, a man of God—the divine in the form of man on earth. Here is the fulfilment of every religion in the simple practice of Transcendental Meditation. The realization of the personal God by necessity will be on the level of human perception, and has to be in the relative field of life. The realization of the impersonal God is in transcendental consciousness, and the realization of the personal God is on the level of consciousness of the waking state. The only way to realize the Almighty and impersonal God is to enter into the subtle strata of things and transcend the subtlest experience. Transcendental Meditation is a way to consciously arrive at the state of the Impersonal, transcendental absolute Being, the almighty transcendental God. Every individual in his true

nature is the Impersonal God.

Thus, the Maharishi, like Shankara, acknowledges the relative reality of a personal God, but subordinates this to the impersonal Brahman or Being which is identical with the individual essence or Atman. Man *is* God without separation: he has only to meditate in order to achieve and realize this identity. The Maharishi's teaching—like Advaita in general and like the teachings of other Advaita exponents such as Chinmayananda—is thus diametrically and inalienably opposed to the teachings of Vishishtadvaita Hinduism, as well as to those of such religions as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, which hold and teach that, while man may be of the same essence as God or be made in God's image, there is nonetheless some degree of separation between man and God.

The Maharishi's avowedly simple method of meditation certainly has the following of millions both in India and throughout the Western world, and is currently doing a roaring trade in the Soviet Union. TM has been adopted in Government programmes, in educational institutions, in business corporations, in prisons and among police authorities; and many insurance companies throughout the world offer a thirty per cent discount on premiums to TM practitioners, on the grounds that they are less susceptible to accidents and illness. TM can certainly claim a success as a system—albeit a somewhat unnecessarily expensive one—of mental training. Yet its ultimate and chief aim is to be far more than that: it is not only to found an ideal society of God-conscious individuals on earth, but it is to found an ideal Vedic society—a society in which the Vedas and 'Vedic science' are shown and acknowledged to be the supreme authority. In other words, what the Maharishi is in fact trying to do is to make Advaita, Ayurveda and the Vedas respectable, palatable to and accepted by a non-Hindu and non-Indian world. In 1986 he said:

> Time demands the rise of the supreme power in the world which can have authority over the dangerous rivalry of superpowers and can act like a dear mother to all nations. India, a natural friend to all nations, with her powerful spiritual heritage, is the only country which can rise as a supreme power in the world and positively dominate over the dangerous rivalry of the superpowers. India, the homeland of the Vedas, is the only country in the world that can turn the key of knowledge and stimulate the infinite organizing power of natural law, the

supreme authority in nature which can win over and subdue the destructive thoughts of the superpowers and free mankind from fear. It is time for India to rise and play her nourishing role in the family of nations. Everyone in the world family will rise together under a strong, indomitable strength of evolutionary power of natural law. This is what will establish a permanent state of world peace.

This statement heralded the start of the Maharishi's programme to create world peace, for which he appealed to 'the leaders and the wealthy, who have the real well-being of humanity at heart' to establish a fund of eighty million dollars to support 10,000 Vedic pandits in maintaining and reviving Vedic rituals, recitations and performance in India. Thus the Maharishi's programme, whether or not it started out with the intention of doing so, has developed into a programme under which both Vedic Hinduism and the Indian nation are held up as supreme; and it is in this way both the outcome of and a propaganda vehicle for the type of Hindu nationalist revival which is currently taking place in India.

TM may try to masquerade as non-religious and non-political: but in doing so, it amounts to little less than a superficial but subtle and persuasive form of Hindu propaganda in disguise. The vast majority of those who practise TM most probably would never consider themselves to be following a strictly Advaita or Monist teaching, nor would they admit that they are seeking to become God during their twice-daily twenty minute meditation sessions. Yet these are at the heart of the TM technique and the Maharishi's teachings, together with the affirmation of Vedic knowledge as supreme. What TM amounts to is a cleverly designed version of a non-theistic set of religious beliefs dressed in a quasi-scientific garb of respectability; the method may be a useful and beneficial one if put in a non-TM setting, but with the Maharishi it has become a tool both for Advaita and Vedic revivalism and for the setting up of a multi-million dollar world-wide organization.

CHAPTER XIII

Brahma Kumaris

Towering above the scorching plains of southern Rajasthan, close to the border with Gujarat in western India, Mount Abu has long been popular as an escape from the oppressive summer heat. Hindu sages, such as Vasishtha and Atri, are said to have come here to meditate in peace, as an alternative to taking refuge among the Himalayan peaks, and their ashrams are maintained here to this day. Groups of Jains came and settled here, and constructed the exquisitely-carved group of Dilwara temples which now draw tourists in their thousands. And the British retreated here in the summer, building fine houses and mansions which today peep out from among the rich green foliage on the hillsides around Nakki Lake, on the shores of which has grown up the small town today popular with tour-groups seeking a respite from the heat of the plains far below.

Here too, a short walk up the road from Nakki Lake, lies the headquarters of the Brahma Kumari movement, its spacious and modern buildings spreading up the hillside as the movement itself prospers and expands. Groups of followers from around the world come here to visit, to reinforce the message that they proclaim, and, spiritually renewed, go forth to spread that message with renewed vigour in their own countries. For the Brahma Kumaris are above all a missionary movement seeking to spread their message world-wide, particularly in influential political circles. A Brahma Kumari museum and meditation hall in the centre of town daily welcomes numerous individuals and tourist groups—a visit there is part of a number of the standard tour itineraries operated by the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation for visitors to Mount Abu—and directs them on to the headquarters, where willing guides will show them around and expound something of Brahma Kumari beliefs. Virginally white-robed Brahma Kumaris are now a common sight around the town and no longer seem to excite the curiosity of either the locals or tourists—both perhaps becoming too used to seeing them flanking Prime

Ministers and Heads of State around the world.

The Brahma Kumaris—literally, Daughters of Brahma or God—is a movement which was established in the late 1930s by Dada (Father) Lekhraj Kripalani. Lekhraj was born in 1870 near Hyderabad in Sind district of what is now Pakistan. His father was a school headmaster. Lekhraj however showed no inclination to follow in his footsteps but gradually established himself first as a wheat merchant and later became a successful diamond dealer, eventually establishing shops in Calcutta and Bombay. He had lucrative dealings spread over many years with innumerable local dignataries and maharajas, even with the British Viceroy, and was particularly involved with the Maharanas of Udaipur. He was also a devout Vaishnava and avid reader of the *Bhagavadgita*, as was his wife, Yasoda. He would go on pilgrimages to various centres, and would invite wandering sadhus to his house as guests. He had his own Guru of the Vallabhacharya sect whom he would obey without question, and he would spend large sums of money on entertaining him and his followers. He caused an uproar in his family when he decided to marry off one of his daughters, Pathe, not into a wealthy family but to a local schoolmaster who was a devout advocate of yoga and meditation. He had a particular respect for women and their spiritual capacities. He was once offended by a picture of Vishnu and Lakshmi which showed Lakshmi in an inferior role and commissioned the artist to redraw it showing Vishnu and Lakshmi on an equal level.

With retirement approaching, Lekhraj began to think increasingly of withdrawing to a more contemplative lifestyle. One day, in 1936, sitting with other disciples of his Guru, he began to have strange sensations and withdrew to his room, where he had a vision of the god Vishnu. He attributed this vision to the grace of his Guru, until he encountered his Guru's blank expressions on recounting his vision to him, and then concluded that there was only one Satguru or true Guru, God himself. Shortly afterward he had another vision of the cataclysmic destruction of the world, and thereafter a further vision of Vishnu in which the god stood before him and said to him, 'I am Vishnu the four-armed; so are you.' Then came the ultimate vision, in which he saw a brilliantly shining light and power and a new world, with star-like bodies descending and forming a new heavenly world on earth. At the same time he was hear l to say, 'I am the blissful Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva; I am the knowledgeful Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva; I am the luminous Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva;

I am the form of Self, the form of knowledge, the form of Light.' This he came to interpret as the god Shiva having entered his body and revealed both the coming destruction and the creation of a new world thereafter; he became convinced that he was the vehicle being used by God to reveal this truth and to be the herald of the new age.

This series of visions marked Lekhraj's spiritual awakening—an awakening in which he gave himself the name Prajapita (Father of Creatures) Brahma, or Brahma Baba. He finally wound up his diamond business and started holding regular religious gatherings or satsangs at his house which came to be known as Om Mandli. His fame grew rapidly—and so did opposition to him; not least because he enjoined his followers, who were mainly women, to abstain from sex and marriage, thereby causing uproar among husbands and fathers in a strongly patriarchal society. He named his followers Brahma Kumaris, daughters or virgins of God, and formed in October 1937 a managing committee composed of women; in February 1938, he bequeathed all his property to the Brahma Kumari Trust. Among his most notable early disciples were his daughter-in-law, Radhika, later known as Brijindraji; a young girl named Gopi, later known as Didi Man Mohini, who became the Brahma Kumaris' chief administrator; a sixteen-year-old girl Rama, now known as Didi Prakashmani who with Dadi Chandermani now effectively heads and runs the Brahma Kumari organization from Mount Abu; another girl named Radha, later renamed Jagadamba (Mother of the Universe) Saraswati; his eldest daughter who, renamed Dadi Nirmal Shanta, now heads the Calcutta branch of Brahma Kumaris; and Dadi Hirday Mohini, also known as Dadi Gulzar, who now heads the Delhi branch and in many respects has taken up the mantle of Lekhraj as the mouthpiece of Shiva Baba.

A school was also set up: but so too was an opposition committee, named Anti Om Mandli, headed by the local Mukhi and using the *Sindhi Observer* to put forward their views. After a series of physical confrontations which culminated in the District Magistrate citing Lekhraj on a charge of disturbing the peace, Lekhraj purchased five bungalows in Karachi and relocated his base there. The community expanded and Lekhraj started sending groups of his followers back to their homes to spread his message. Lekhraj remained in Karachi after partition in 1947; but three years later, after an exploratory visit to India by Didi Man Mohini, the institution moved from Karachi to its present headquarters,

Mount Abu, Rajasthan. Lekhraj had all along sought to spread his teachings, both personally to his followers and through innumerable letters to Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammed Ali Jinnah, to the Viceroy Lord Wavell, to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and King George VI, to President Truman and many others. Now he started sending forth the Brahma Kumaris throughout India, to spread the teachings and establish centres in all major cities. In 1965 Jagadamba Saraswati, the spiritual mother of the movement, died; and Lekhraj himself died on 18 January 1969—a day now celebrated by Brahma Kumaris as World Meditation Day, or the Day of Spiritual Ascension of Prajapita Brahma.

Since Lekhraj's death the movement has gone from strength to strength. It is not large—it currently numbers around a quarter of a million—but its influence far outweighs its size. The first overseas centre was opened in London in 1971 by Dadi Janaki who still presides, although much of the everyday running is now done by Dadi Jayanti; there are now some 200 centres abroad, particularly in the UK, West Germany, Australia, Canada, the US, Brazil and the West Indies. Brahma Kumaris wander the corridors of the UN; the Guyana parliament opens its proceedings with three minutes of Brahma Kumari meditation. The UK alone has twenty-five Brahma Kumari centres; the City Councils of Leeds and Cardiff, and the Borough of Redditch have declared themselves Cities of Cooperation with the Mount Abu Declaration (see below); many schools have adopted the Brahma Kumaris' school pack of instruction under official endorsement by the Department of Education and Science; while Lord Ennals has done much to promote the Brahma Kumari cause both in the UK and at the UN, being a co-chair and introducer in May 1989 of the Mount Abu Declaration on 'Global Cooperation for a Better World.' What then lies behind this apparently widespread appeal?

Brahma Kumari teachings are a greatly modified and simplified form of Hinduism, although the movement itself would be more properly termed a Hindu offshoot, holding many beliefs which a traditional Hindu would not accept. The centrepiece is that God as Shiva is symbolized by light, sweetness and bliss; man too bears within him a soul which is like a spark of that light, a spark which reflects the nature of the Supreme Light and is destined to return to the company of that Light. Man's first duty is to differentiate between the material and spiritual; he must set aside the vices of sex and lust, anger, greed, hate and attachment and lead a pure and abstemious celibate life as a vegetarian, free from alcohol, tobacco

and other drugs and detached from family, relatives and friends; through meditation he must commune with his spiritual nature and identify as a child of God. In this respect the approach is one of Bhakti or devotion, not self-realization as identical with God. Yet it is Bhakti in the sense of love of God as distinct from worship of God. Soul and matter are both permanently existent and permanently separate, antipathetic to each other. The scheme of time plays a large and important role in the Brahma Kumari outlook. They accept the time-frame of four Yugas or Ages, but claim that Hindu scriptures got the computations wrong; each Yuga lasts only for 1,250 years, and the present Kali Yuga is about to end in a cataclysmic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, resulting in a nuclear holocaust (which, some I have spoken to say, will happen in the year 2000 AD). This was the reason why Shiva manifested himself in the body of Lekhraj; to warn mankind of the impending destruction, and to awaken the chosen souls to their spiritual identity as sparks of divine light destined to be reborn after the holocaust into a new Satya Yuga or Golden Age. All the rest are destined for divine chastisement and punishment before being readmitted to the world of liberated souls. Man has up to eighty-four different incarnations on earth during the succession of four Yugas; these are always as a human being, never as an animal. This latter again stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Hindu view, wherein man can be reborn in virtually any form depending on his activities in his present life.

The path of liberation for the Brahma Kumaris lies in Raja or Royal Yoga—a term used perhaps to hide the simplicity of the method, which involves developing an awareness of the separation between material and spiritual and a consciousness of one's identity as a child of God, brought about either through listening to fairly hypnotic tapes with soothing background music or through silent contemplation and concentration on pictures of Lekhraj surmounted by an illuminated Shiva-lingam. The movement remains a predominantly female one; there are male members, termed Brahma Kumars, but all the organization and leadership comes from women. In his final discourse, Lekhraj exhorted his followers to do three things: to realize their true natures as incorporeal souls; to be free from all vices; and to abandon pride, ego and body-consciousness. Added to this was the enjoinder to have a loving and conscious link with God, and companionship and brotherhood with all men under the fatherhood of God. This, together with awareness of the impending end of the world,

summarizes the Brahma Kumaris' outlook; it is understandably the latter awareness which gives the movement its impetus to be active and missionary in approach, to spread the message in the little time that remains before the final destruction of the Kali Yuga overtakes us all.

Lekhraj denied that he was a Guru, and denied that he himself was God. Both of these need some qualification, however. He is certainly not regarded by his followers as God; yet what he did claim for himself was a status higher than that of his followers, inasmuch as he saw God—in the form of Shiva—using him and speaking through him; more than that, Brahma Kumaris believe that in the new Satya Yuga he will reincarnate as none other than Vishnu, while his leading follower Saraswati will reincarnate as his wife Lakshmi. He is sometimes identified by his followers as Brahma Baba, sometimes as Shiva Baba (insofar as Shiva manifested himself through him); and it thus follows that devotion to Baba is seemingly synonymous with devotion to God. Similarly, while Lekhraj himself abandoned earthly Gurus and turned to the one Satguru or God as the guide and goal, so he himself embodies both these roles for his followers today: in him lies the path, and in him lies the goal. In a similar way, Brahma Kumaris accept that God—in the combined form of Shiva and Brahma—continues to speak through Lekhraj's spiritual successor Dadi Hirday Mohini, or Dadi Gulzar.

The Brahma Kumaris accept the Hindu triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, but with a subtle yet significant difference. Brahma is identical with Lekhraj, the creator of the new Satya Yuga (since matter is eternal, he no longer has the task of creating universes); Vishnu, who in Lekhraj's vision announced himself as identical with Lekhraj, is now, as Narayan, the form of Lekhraj in the Satya Yuga; and Shankara (another name of Shiva) is the destroyer not so much of the worlds as of man's ignorance, thereby being also the liberator who induces man through meditation, to recognize his true self or soul. Over and above this triad is Shiva, the Eternal Light, Peace and Bliss, the One who spoke through Lekhraj / Brahma and into whose presence all souls are destined to ascend following the end of the Kali Yuga and thence descend to a new golden earth at the start of the Satya Yuga.

The organization established by Lekhraj in 1937 bears the full title Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya—the Virgin Daughters of Brahma, Father of Creatures, Godly University. The teachings imparted at the 'University' based in Mount Abu are

exclusively an expanded version of those outlined over the last few pages. Nearly all Brahma Kumari writings come from the pen or editorship of Jagdish Chander, a prolific writer based in Delhi who heads the literature 'department' of the Brahma Kumari 'University'. The aim of the teachings is to re-educate followers and sympathizers to think, feel and experience along the lines of the Brahma Kumari outlook, and then send them out into the world to spread the word to others—the overall aim being to awaken soul-consciousness and foster universal brotherhood and cooperation among mankind under the Fatherhood of Shiva-Baba, the Universal Light. The Brahma Kumaris lay great emphasis on this approach being open to followers of all creeds and religions; the Declaration made at Mount Abu in February 1987 for Global Cooperation for a Better World, which has been adopted by the United Nations and by several governments and governmental bodies, bears little trace of the fullness of Brahma Kumari beliefs. This, say the Brahma Kumaris, is because many would not understand, or might be put off the idea when confronted with all the beliefs. They could well be right. There is undoubtedly much that is laudable in what the Brahma Kumaris are trying to achieve. But it is only right that all should be aware of why they are trying to achieve it, of the beliefs that lie behind the actions. A Christian, for example, should be aware that Brahma Kumaris explicitly deny the divinity of Christ, while acknowledging him—alongside Abraham, Buddha, Muhammad, Nanak and others—as a pure soul or spark of light and an inspired teacher whose 'dynasty' or rule lasts for 2000 years. The Brahma Kumari claim that what they teach is not a religion but an education of man—expounded through their 'University'—is simply not true and is a form of intellectual sophistry. It is a religion, at variance on many points with Hinduism, although drawing strongly from it, and involves both a set of beliefs and a way of life.

Following the lead of Lekhraj, the Brahma Kumaris target especially—but by no means exclusively—Heads of State and prominent individuals and organizations to receive their message (conveyed in whatever form). The walls of the Mount Abu centre are full of photographs of Brahma Kumaris—especially Dadi Prakashmani—in the company of such figures as Rajiv Gandhi, Queen Elizabeth II, the UN Secretary-General, Pope Paul VI, the President and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, foreign Ambassadors and High Commissioners and their wives, and numerous others. Few of these are probably aware of

what the Brahma Kumaris stand for and believe in; and those who commit themselves to promoting the Brahma Kumaris, such as Lord Ennals, the Guyana and Mauritian parliaments, Departments of Education and City Councils, should be fully aware of Brahma Kumari teachings and beliefs before choosing to do so. The Brahma Kumaris' frequent omission to tell the full story of their beliefs otherwise lays them open to the charge of seeking converts by stealth.

CHAPTER XIV

Rajneesh

Right up to his death and hasty dispatch on 19 January 1990, Rajneesh was continuing to attract to his Pune ashram, growing flocks of devotees and followers from around the world eager to partake in the meditation groups he had devised and to imbibe the words and vibrations of their Master. Their numbers and influence grew remarkably from when I first came across Rajneesh in Bombay in 1971 to when I last visited the Pune ashram in the summer of 1989, a few months before he died. The leafy residential suburb of Koregaon Park, in the eastern part of the city, was by then once again playing host—albeit somewhat unwillingly—to a renewed influx of 'Rajneeshies', coming in ever-increasing numbers to the ashram of Rajneesh. Throughout the 1970s the considerably bemused residents of Pune had looked with amazement and sometimes hostility as wave upon wave of orange-clad Rajneeshies wandered, cycled and made love in their streets; and many, except the taxi-drivers and hotel-owners, had heaved a sigh of relief when Rajneesh departed secretly for America in 1981, closely followed by his orange-clad disciples. But since his return at the start of 1987, his followers—no longer sporting their orange robes—had been coming in increasing numbers, up to a thousand newcomers each day. The largest numbers were from Germany, Italy and Japan—ironically, the three main countries defeated in the Second World War; yet virtually every nationality seemed to be represented, and the taxi-drivers and hotel-owners were once again rubbing their hands with glee. So too was the ashram itself, which charged ten rupees per day for every visitor or disciple to even enter its premises; new building work was proceeding apace, and the ashram was buying up and expanding into several surrounding houses and properties. The range of activities and meditation groups at the ashram was similarly expanding, far beyond the previous Pune heydays; and the pervading atmosphere was one of confidence and buoyant optimism, despite the fact that Rajneesh himself

was known to be a sick, ailing and in many quarters discredited man.

Who then was the man at the centre of all this? Rajneesh was probably the most controversial, the most outrageously outspoken, the most enigmatic and in many ways the most stimulating and provocative of Gurus or intellectual teachers in the present century. The basic facts of his life are readily accessible. Rajneesh Chandra Mohan was born on 11 December 1931 in Kuchwada, a small village near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. His father was a moderately successful cloth merchant, and his family were followers of the Jain religion. Rajneesh was the eldest of thirteen children, and for the first seven years of his life he was brought up not by his parents but by his grandparents, who lived in Timarni some seventy kilometers south-west of Hoshangabad in Central India. There he was, as he himself admitted, utterly spoilt and allowed to do exactly what he wanted; this sowed the seeds of what developed into a wholly rebellious character who set out to question, challenge and defy every accepted convention and belief; a hard-core, strong-willed individualist with a wild, unruly and undisciplined nature that was the cause of frequent complaints from neighbours even at that early age. When his grandfather died, seven-year-old Rajneesh and his grandmother went to live with Rajneesh's parents in the town of Gadarwara, 160 kilometres east of Hoshangabad. Here, at school, he rapidly developed his reputation as an argumentative and outspoken rebel. He would play tricks on his teachers; one teacher who lectured the class on fearlessness was put to fear the next day when Rajneesh brought into class a large snake he had borrowed from a Muslim snake charmer; another was nicknamed 'Baldy' by Rajneesh, but refused to accept this name until he was finally forced to sign himself 'Baldy' to collect a money order which Rajneesh had arranged to have delivered to him made out in that name. He would report other teachers to the local authorities for using corporal punishment; and he would frequently play truant—much to the relief of his teachers—preferring to frequent local wrestlers, circus performers, magicians, drunkards, wandering musicians and the like—much to the embarrassment of his family. His father's attempts to discipline him were of no avail: when he cut his son's long and unruly hair, Rajneesh immediately went to a barber and had his whole head shaved—the traditional sign of mourning for a dead father; and when his favourite Punjabi clothes were hidden, in an attempt to get him to wear more conventional clothes, Rajneesh walked around naked until they were

returned to him. Rajneesh was not only strong-willed and rebellious; he was also a voracious reader of whatever books he could lay his hands on—a trait which did not leave him until around seven years before his death, when he was forbidden by his doctor to read more in order to preserve his eyesight; this accounts for his unquestionably very wide and catholic knowledge, particularly of philosophical and religious systems. After leaving school with passes in all subjects—according to some, due to his teachers not wanting to fail him for fear of having to endure a further year of his presence—he went on in 1952 to study philosophy in Jabalpur. Here he again distinguished himself as an inveterate and incorrigible argumentalist, so much so that his logics professor at D.N. Jain College decreed that either he or Rajneesh had to go—and Rajneesh was transferred to Hitkarini College on condition that he did not attend the philosophy classes.

It was during his first year of philosophy studies at Jabalpur that Rajneesh reportedly became enlightened—on 21 March 1953, at the age of twenty-one. Exactly what is meant by enlightenment for Rajneesh will be examined a little further on. The experience did not cause any immediate change in the course of his life: he continued with his studies and with his disputations with his professors—on the way collecting the prize of All-India Debating Champion, and taking a year off to work on a local newspaper, the *Navbharat*—and in 1957 graduated with an M.A. in logic, philosophy and literature. The following year he was appointed philosophy teacher at the Raipur Mahakoshal Sanskrit College and just one year after that was appointed professor of philosophy at Jabalpur University (now the Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya). There he remained for nine years, until 1966, teaching by the then, fairly unorthodox method of giving first an account of the teachings of such philosophers as Aristotle, and then an account of why he considered such teachings to be wrong. During his Jabalpur days he also started travelling throughout India delivering lectures and talks aimed at awakening people to their true nature and to the realization of truth; and he held his first five-day meditation camp—the first of many—at Mount Abu, Rajasthan, in June 1964. Finding that he could reach far more people far more satisfactorily by this method, he resigned from Jabalpur in 1966 and devoted himself full-time to speaking at gatherings and meditation camps. It was not long before he attracted controversy, particularly through outspoken comments and indictments of such prominent figures as

Gandhi, Mother Teresa, the Shankaracharya of Puri and contemporary Indian politicians, and through advocating sex as a path to enlightenment—a teaching which earned him the epithet 'Sex Guru' from the Indian press. Calling himself first 'Acharya' or teacher, Rajneesh soon adopted the title 'Bhagwan': a title which in a Hindu context means 'God'. He also set up his base in Bombay in 1969, and at his on-going meditation camps at Mount Abu he introduced 'Dynamic Meditation', based on the principle that the mind and body must first work out their movement and restlessness before a person could arrive at a motionless state, the necessary precursor to enlightenment. He also started initiating followers—after 1970, predominantly Western followers—into 'Sannyas', a renunciation of commitment to the world, giving them a new Sanskrit name, orange robes and a mala or string of beads with a prominently-displayed photograph of himself. In 1974 he shifted his base to a six-acre ashram in Pune founded on the twenty-first anniversary of his enlightenment; and the stream of Western visitors turned into almost a flood over the next seven years, with Rajneesh giving discourses to audiences of around 2,000 each day, audiences which included such observers as Alan Whicker and Bernard Levin who came away with little but praise for their experience. The Pune ashram also witnessed during this phase the flowering of innumerable psychotherapy and encounter groups, aimed at clearing the mind and emotions, together with such therapy techniques as massage, acupuncture, hypnosis, reflexology, gestalt, rolfing and rebirthing. In short the ashram became a mecca of 'new age' techniques and attracted to it some of the leading psychotherapy practitioners from the West; it attracted also large numbers of skilled professional and academically qualified people, people already successful in their fields yet still in search of something more.

Rajneesh continued his, often vehement, onslaught against authorities, against organized religions, against Morarji Desai (then Indian Prime Minister) and in favour of birth control and abortion as the only solution to India's poverty problem. In 1980 an attempt was made against his life during one of his lectures when a Hindu threw a knife at him; in 1981 Rajneesh stopped speaking, entered a phase of silence and seclusion, and—on the pretext that he might need an emergency operation for a recurrent back complaint resulting from a slipped disc—he left India with a group of close followers in May and took up residence at a 64,000 acre ranch in the Oregon desert in the USA. The ranch rapidly developed into

an agricultural commune and the ashram of Rajneeshpuram (Rajneesh city), housing around 5,000 permanent residents and up to 20,000 visitors during its summer festival. It was, at least at the start, a dynamic and thriving community, a self-sufficient society of orange-clad Rajneeshies having little contact with the outside world. This was perhaps a far from small contributory factor to the growing problems that surrounded the ashram: for while it was growing into what was claimed to be the largest single spiritual community ever pioneered in America, there was little comprehension and mounting opposition and hostility towards it on the part of local, largely Christian fundamentalist residents and State authorities, which rapidly escalated to the Federal level once Rajneesh's application for a permanent resident's permit was refused in 1983 (he had entered the USA on a tourist visa). Problems were compounded by developments within the community.

During Rajneesh's four-year silence the running of the commune was in the hands of his secretary, Sheela, an Indian Sannyasin who had taken over this role from Lakshmi shortly before the move from Pune; she also acted as his intermediary and spokesperson. Her rule became increasingly despotic and fascistic, seeking for example, to impose a twelve hour work rule and indulging in phone-tapping, ostensibly to try to identify FBI infiltrators and subversive elements within the commune. Rajneesh broke his silence and started giving taped discourses in October 1984, and returned to giving public discourses in July 1985—not least uttering scathing criticisms of the US authorities, particularly Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Edward Meese, for what he saw as their concerted efforts and campaigns to undermine the commune. In the midst of this, Sheela, seeing her own position being undermined by Rajneesh's return, abandoned the commune without warning in September 1985 and fled to Germany, leaving exposed in her wake a series of instances of wire-tapping, arson, attempted poisoning and the embezzlement of fifty million dollars. Rajneesh called in the US authorities to investigate; charges were laid, Sheela was extradited and convicted, and eventually released in 1988, since when she has sought unsuccessfully to set up a restaurant in Germany. However it was perhaps this event more than any other that spurred the US authorities, already heavily under fire from Rajneesh himself, to take action. He was indicted by a Federal grand jury in October 1985 on immigration fraud charges; was arrested in North Carolina, held in prison first there and then in Oklahoma before being

returned to Portland, Oregon where he pleaded guilty to the charges and was fined 400,000 dollars and deported to India in November 1985. It was later claimed that during his detention he was poisoned with thallium, a rare metal. However, the Indian authorities shortly afterwards refused visa extensions for Rajneesh's new American secretary, Prem Hasya, for his British personal doctor, Amrito, and for other close followers, and from December 1985 to July 1986 he and they engaged in a world odyssey seeking a country in which to settle and establish a community. But aside from brief stays in Nepal, Greece, Ireland, Uruguay and Portugal, they were deported from or denied entry to twenty-one countries, allegedly due to pressure from the American Government.

Rajneesh finally returned again to Bombay, and after a six-month stay there, he returned once more to the Pune ashram in January 1987. Once again the ashram there became a flourishing, dynamic and expanding community attracting each day several thousands of followers from around the world, the majority from Germany, Italy and Japan. In January 1989 he announced that he no longer wanted to be called Bhagwan; but at the suggestion of his followers he agreed to be called 'Osho', a traditional Japanese form of respectful address now generally given to Shinto or Buddhist priests. In 1989 Rajneesh also set up his own 'Multiversity' encompassing originally the Centre for Transformation—incorporating the earlier, and some new psychotherapy group techniques—the Mystery School—including astrology, Tibetan healing and other occult sciences—and the School of Creative Arts—training in arts and crafts, music and dance. But Rajneesh himself, although giving discourses and leading meditations to start with, once again reverted to silence in early 1989, giving between then and his death in January 1990 only brief periodic appearances. Controversy followed him even at his death, as—much to the consternation of his followers and his family—his body was on public view for only ten minutes before being taken to the nearby cremation ground and reduced to ashes.

The above details of Rajneesh and his followers may help to correct the many inaccurate and biased accounts particularly about his Pune and Oregon days. Similarly, inaccurate accounts abound about his teachings, exerpts from which have frequently been cited out of context solely for their provocative and controversial content—and often enough they lead themselves all too easily to that. It has first to be understood that Rajneesh followed no particular religion, no single tradition or philosophy; he was

indeed anti-religion, anti-tradition, a supreme iconoclast. He was against all beliefs and systems, against all institutions which have grown up in the name of religion and which, in his view, hinder the essence of being religious—an essence which resides alone in personal experience. What he did was to use religions, the teachings of Vedanta, of Bhakti, of the Buddha and Zen masters, of the Sufi mystics of Islam, of Jesus and Kabir, of Tantra and Tao, to illustrate and point to what religious experience means; and he emphasized again and again that these are only pointers, that what is needed is to learn from and understand these teachings, but more than that to experience them, to experience what they are talking about, to experience the God within and to experience enlightenment.

There are in a sense two aspects to what Rajneesh was saying; one is the goal, the other is the innumerable paths leading to the goal. The goal is enlightenment; to experience life as it is, the divinity of life, set aside thoughts, the mind, all preconceptions and preconditions, all beliefs and ideas, and to delve deep, deep within oneself, through one's various layers of consciousness and awareness, to discover and experience the still centre within. It is a centre free of ego, not identified with any aspect of oneself; a centre of silence, light and joy, a centre of Life—a life which is not only one's own centre, but is the centre of all existence. Merging with that silent centre, one merges with the flow of life, with the awareness of Life as it whispers through the trees and birds, as it bubbles through the brooks and rivers, as it lies dormant within everyone, waiting to be discovered. For Rajneesh, as for all mystics, enlightenment and God are not something that comes from outside; they are something already within man waiting to be uncovered; they are the immanent core of his being, separate from and unlimited by his mind and body, his individual self. According to Rajneesh:

> Enlightenment simply means an experience of your consciousness unclouded by past emotions, sentiments. When the consciousness is totally empty, there is something like an explosion—like an atomic explosion. Your whole inside becomes full of light which has no source and no cause or past, and once it has happened it remains. It never leaves you for a single moment. Even when you are asleep that light is inside, and after that moment you can see things in a totally different way. Everybody can be enlightened, enlightenment is the only thing, the only experience where everybody is equal—equally

capable. It is not a doctrine that I am preaching to you. it is simply an arbitrary device to give you a taste of what silence is. It belongs to all, without any conditions; you just have to become aware of it. And that's my whole purpose in speaking to you. Enlightenment can happen when you are so silent, so relaxed, that you are almost not. You can get enlightened today—because enlightenment is your innermost being. Just because you are so much engaged in effort, in seeking, searching, doing this, doing that, you never reach to your own self. All efforts for enlightenment are stupid. Enlightenment is your nature, it is just that you don't know it; otherwise you are enlightened already. All that you have to do is for a moment to relax totally, forget all doing, efforts, so that you are no more occupied anywhere. This unoccupied consciousness suddenly becomes aware that "I am it!" Meditation is simply watchfulness, awareness. It simply discovers that which is there. You enter and you find infinite emptiness, so tremendously beautiful, so silent, so full of light, so fragrant, that you have entered into the Kingdom of God. In my words, you have entered into godliness. . . .

Such is the nature and character of the goal to which Rajneesh points, which he himself claimed to embody, in which he invites others to partake. In this experience lies the only equality among men; apart from this, all men are not equal, all are different, on different levels, adopt different approaches—whether intellectual, emotional or whatever—and possess different aptitudes and abilities. Accordingly, each will adopt a different path to lead them towards this goal. The various methodologies and psychotherapeutic methods followed at the ashrams in Pune and elsewhere have as their aim a type of catharsis: they are designed to let the body, the mind and emotions free themselves from all bottled-up and subconscious blockages and hang-ups; to work them through, exorcise them, and allow the person to emerge liberated and unfettered by them. In order to reach stillness and silence, the body must first work out of itself all its inherent and inborn tendencies towards activity and motion. This will then allow the consciousness to develop more and more; it will allow a deeper awareness to evolve, particularly through such still and silent meditational methods as Vipassana Buddhist meditation. And at the heart of that deeper awareness there will one day dawn the experience of

enlightenment. It is worth adding since it is a point that has aroused so much controversy, that while he adopted a firm stance against the use of drugs, alcohol, meat and to a lesser extent, tobacco, sex is one of the paths advocated by Rajneesh to be followed while *en route* towards the inner goal. For Rajneesh, it is to be followed as a route which can develop one's awareness of the body, its functions and desires, as also one's awareness and expression of love. Hugging and massaging are other ways also advocated of developing this same awareness. Yet at the heart of Rajneesh's advocacy of sex is also the idea that it both can and must lead to such higher awareness—as is implied in the very title of his famous 1968 book *From Sex to Superconsciousness*. It is an energy which must not be an end in itself, but must develop from the physical to the psychological and the spiritual, leading man ultimately to his inner soul: 'The light that shines in orgasm transcends sex. It comes from the beyond. If we can comprehend this experience of the beyond we can rise above sex.' Like the other paths, the underlying idea is that a higher awareness can only come about not by repressing or denying one's nature, but by exploring it, delving to its very roots and discovering ultimately what lies beyond it. Since 1984 Rajneesh also decreed as obligatory the use of condoms, and possession of a current 'Aids-free' certificate before anyone was permitted to enter the ashram.

One of the keys to understanding Rajneesh and his approach lies in understanding his early life. He was by nature a wild and unruly rebel, in revolt against all systems, which he regarded as having only trapped and fettered man; they have trapped his mind, and prevented him from progressing further towards the actual experience of what they teach. He was unquestionably immensely erudite and widely-read, and had a deep and generally accurate understanding of all the various traditions and teachings which he expounded. He was often outrageously outspoken and controversial, challenging accepted beliefs and institutions in an attempt to persuade others to go beyond these and seek out the truth for themselves, within themselves. He had a bitingly sharp, shrewd and analytical mind well capable of dissecting words and phrases with penetrating and nit-picking logic. He was without doubt a brilliant orator, well able to judge the mood of his audience, alternating between deep seriousness and a cathartic and infectious humour. He could hold an audience in the palm of his hand through an almost hypnotic style of address; what he spoke was often pure poetry, punctuated by long

pregnant silences between words and phrases in which he simply surveyed his audience with deep, penetrating and unblinking eyes. He was a man who knew that as soon as, or even before he spoke, he had the full and undivided attention of his audience: he reveled in it.

He was a supreme rebel against all establishments. Religious and political hierarchies, priests and politicians, came in for particular attack: whether it was Morarji Desai, for withdrawing the ashram's tax-exempt status as a charity; the Indian authorities generally for hindering visa applications for his followers; Ronald Reagan and Edward Meese, and the US Government generally, for what he saw as orchestrating a sustained campaign against him and the Oregon commune; the 'Polack' Pope Paul VI, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and Mother Teresa for hiding God in dogmas and rituals, setting themselves up as the only and false channel to God, and perpetuating and exploiting the poor—a heading under which came priests and religious leaders of all traditions, whether it be Greek Orthodox, Hindu, Muslim or whatever. He saw himself as the rebel against The Establishment—a black and white distinction which seemingly had no grey borders, a simplistic division into those who were for him and those he thought stood against him. In doing so, he could scarcely be surprised when those he criticized so vehemently and often so viciously then turned round and reacted against him, as he had automatically cut off any opportunity for serious dialogue, any chance of change through persuasion. He was by nature a controversialist, and without controversy—without having something or someone to argue against—his message would have lost much of its sharp focus, its biting edge, its appeal.

He was a man of contradictions. He would often literally contradict himself from one day to another; and when occasionally picked up on this, would say, 'No, I didn't say that, you misunderstood; what I meant was. . . .' He was selective in his teachings, and clearly had little real sympathy for theistic traditions, whether they be Hindu, Christian or Muslim. He selected from those traditions which would best serve his purposes once he had reinterpreted them according to his own understanding. He would, for example, expound certain themes from selected Sufi mystics, from the Gospel of Thomas or John, from the *Bhagavata Purana*, moulding them to shape his own message, discarding the bits that did not fit by saying that Jesus did not mean that, the priests and the mullahs have altered this to hide the true meaning, the Krishna

Bhaktas have got this wrong. In other words, Rajneesh himself allowed his own mind to play tricks; wherever traditions disagreed with what he himself thought and what he considered conformed to his own experience—which he claimed to be absolute and ultimate—he rejected what these traditions actually say, and instead of admitting this, he said 'Let me tell you the real secret of these traditions, what they mean to say', which was of course then developed into what he wanted to say. His most frequently-chosen vehicle for expounding his methods and teachings was Zen Buddhism, which contains that which conformed to his own outlook; this and the adoption of the name 'Osho' makes it not surprising that so many of his followers in recent years were from Japan, where Zen has its greatest following. He was frequently and rather surprisingly, inaccurate in his accounts, particularly of theistic traditions, making basic factual errors; yet these were allowed to pass by his followers on the grounds that they did not matter, that he did not claim to be infallible, that his words were only pointers towards the experience of enlightenment. Rajneesh's goal, the experience at the end of the road was Monistic: it was the unitary goal of Advaita Vedanta, the goal of *'Tat tvam asi'* 'I am Brahman', the goal of becoming Buddha; it was not the goal of being in the presence of God but the goal of becoming God without any division or separation:

> The apex of perfection happens in the profound depths of emptiness and the music of existence comes out of the silence of non-existence—and then one knows that Nirvana itself is the realization of Brahma, of the creator, of God. There is neither duality nor multiplicity in Him, but unity. Such a man is integrated; such a man is free of duality. To me this realization is God. God is not a person, he is an experience. The vision, the experience one has of the universe after the dissolution of the ego, is what I call God. There is no particular type of experience of God, rather, the experience of perfect and universal love is God. It has no centre; it is all existence. It is incorrect to talk of the experience of God but you can say the experience of perfect love is God. I am reminded here of a saying of Christ's : 'God is love'. Love itself is God. It is therefore impossible to know God but it is possible to become God. Life has no aim other than itself, because life is another name for God himself. You can call it existence, you can call it God, you can call it life; these are different names of a single reality. God is the name

given to life by the theologians, and it has a danger in it because it can be refuted. It remains more or less an empty word; it means whatever you want it to mean. My choice is 'life'. Life contains everything that is needed, moreover it needs no proof. You are life. You are the proof. A man who is not rebellious cannot be religious—rebellious against the past, rebellious against organized religions, rebellious against all the people who want to dominate you. There is no God as a person. God is spread all over—in the trees, in the birds, in the animals: all that is alive is nothing but godliness.

What neither Rajneesh nor his followers seemed able to admit is that Rajneesh, his teachings, and his experience are far from unique. Rajneesh the man certainly was unique: his teaching was expressed in a unique manner, yet the central goal of that teaching, the experience of life, is very far from being unique. On the contrary, it has been experienced and witnessed by many others before him. He claimed on the one hand that all his followers, all humanity can share this experience for themselves; yet at the same time he denied that other living teachers have experienced it, at least to the same depth or as fully as himself; and none of his followers have, it seems, attained enlightenment (one, a Briton called Teertha now settled in Germany, has claimed to have done so, but the claim is vehemently denied in Pune). Rajneesh claimed that his experience, his enlightenment was beyond all traditions, institutions and dogmas; yet he expressed himself to his Western followers, in terms which indicate very clearly that he accepted rebirth of all but enlightened masters (notably himself).

Much of the attraction of Rajneesh lay in his amazingly persuasive, hypnotic and powerful personality; in the hauntingly poetic quality of his speech and his silences, in his usually sound grasp and exposition of philosophical and mystical traditions, in his own intellectual challenges of accepted creeds and ways of thought. It lay too in the various paths he selected for his followers which are expounded, explored and experienced at the ashram: paths, such as the various psychotherapy groups which of themselves have nothing essentially 'Rajneesh' about them and which could otherwise be as easily pursued in New York, London, Bonn or Tokyo, but which under his umbrella acquired almost a new purpose and aim. And there grew up above all the personality cult, not as obvious as in the early days of the mala with his picture and his advocacy of following

the Sufi path of *fana* or self-obliteration in the master, but expressed in more subtle ways of psychological domination and control, dehypnosis to a state in which the mind is open to a new form of programming in conformity with his outlook—for, since his followers are not yet enlightened, they are by definition accepting as a belief the assurances of the master that this is the way things are, this is the way in which we must change the world. What was happening in Pune, around Rajneesh, was a kind of grand psychological game, intellectually and emotionally challenging, stimulating, yet ultimately, potentially highly dangerous for many participants once they became dependant on striving for a goal which the master assured them they could reach yet, when they thought they may be close, he warned them that they still had far to go. One cannot help suspecting that the advocacy of certain paths, notably sex and Tantra, astrology, many of the 'Mystery School' activities, even the pottery classes, was designed—whether by Rajneesh or by his followers—to attract a wider following. For many, this multiplicity of methods and paths, which could be shared with others of a like mind and inclination, certainly formed part of the attraction; as did too the spirit of rebellion and challenge of accepted conventions and traditional beliefs, along with the masterful way these were expressed in his discourses and question-and-answer sessions, now readily available in the form of over 650 books under his name, containing, we are told, some sixty million words and translated into thirty-two different languages.

Rajneesh stood firmly against all organized and institutionalized religion; yet his ashram and his teaching now stand in danger of developing into just that. The Oregon experience has demonstrated what can happen when these fall into the hands of unscrupulous followers who can then manipulate and subtly change things in the master's name; and while Rajneesh himself was probably not to blame directly for this, he can nonetheless be faulted for not being aware of what was happening around him, and should have taken this as a warning of what might happen, once again if he was no longer there, at the hands of, perhaps, 'enlightened' disciples.

Rajneesh, it should be by now clear, never advocated rejection of the world. He never advocated poverty but rather enjoyment of the good things in life, to which his former fleet of ninety-five Rolls-Royces bears witness. The ashram, and the movement, is without question, still a major money-spinner dealing in units of millions of dollars. For Rajneesh,

dealing in such multi-millions was a game; for many onlookers it was a scandal and he would have done better to establish charitable institutions. In answer, Rajneesh emphasized that his aim was to lead people to their own enlightenment, and if he gave all his money to the poor, this would be of brief help to their bodies but of no relevance to their enlightenment. Rather it would confirm them in their poverty and dependence on others, while the real need was to provide contraceptives as an effective solution to the poverty trap. Rajneesh's approach was, first be selfish, meditate, discover your inner world, become enlightened—then unselfishness will come, because when you discover God in your being, you have to share it. Yet, all one can say is that this does not seem to have happened with Rajneesh: since his enlightenment he neither distributed contraceptives nor helped to spread his message by lowering either the entrance fee to the ashram or the not inconsiderable price of his books for those not able to afford them. On the contrary, the whole set-up was geared to the acquisition and attraction of money to be spent solely on the needs and purposes of the ashram and its principal inhabitant.

There is much about Rajneesh, his teachings and his methods that is healthy, challenging, stimulating and conducive to personal growth. Yet there is much too that is contradictory, self-deceptive and ultimately witnesses to a powerfully strong ego at its centre. For Rajneesh had a vision of the future world being guided by his Zorba the Buddhas, his enlightened rebels, where all the old values, old ideals would be dropped and new ones would take their place: a new humanity would evolve to replace the present suffering and ugly society with one in which there was no money, no politics or politicians, no cause for injustice and no need for a judiciary; his new Sannyasin rebels would transform this earth into a paradise, and create gods out of all human beings. It would be a world free of religions and priests, under a single world government, with power in the hands of a meritocratic intelligentsia and societies organized as an association of communes; those holding power would have first undergone a four-year Rajneesh deprogramming and meditation; birth control would be mandatory, euthanasia encouraged, the family structure dismembered and replaced by the commune where children would live apart from their parents, and all would be happy and comfortable under the guidance of Rajneesh's latterly-proposed World Academy of Creative Science, Arts and Consciousness—presumably to develop out of the Multiversity. This amazingly simplistic utopian vision—published in

1989 as *The Greatest Challenge: The Golden Future*, seems destined more than anything else that Rajneesh said or did to categorize him as a profoundly unrealistic dreamer who will be taken increasingly unseriously, even by those who might otherwise have been persuaded by his oratory and rhetoric. For this above all marks out Rajneesh as one who, far from going beyond all institutions and dogmas, wanted to establish his own society; one who had a concept—an intellectual concept of a global commune of his own deprogrammed followers ruling and guiding the world according to his own vision. And when he assured his followers in other contexts that, 'I promise to be with you whenever you need me. Just need me!' it is clear above all that however much he might have sought to deny it—either to himself or to others—there was at work a powerful ego seeking to express itself, to impress itself on others and to be remembered. This ego can be seen at work in his discourses and replies to questions, where he would frequently bitterly attack a Pope or politician, where he would psychologically demolish one of his followers, overwhelming them through the sheer power of his personality, then skilfully and soothingly put the pieces together again in a new pattern. He emphasized strongly and repeatedly that enlightenment would bring with it, for his followers, change—a total change in outlook in behaviour, a rejection of worldly aims and ideals. Yet such change was remarkably lacking after his own enlightenment experience;he continued not only with his studies and previous behavioural patterns for a further three years, but thereafter for a further nine years he continued to both expound and put forward his own views of philosophers and philosophical systems within an institutional university context, in a country where it would have been only too easy for him to abandon the institutional framework and set up his own in conformity with his new outlook and awareness. The fact that he did not is, in itself, indication enough that even then at the time of his 'enlightenment', there was still working powerfully within him, a dominative ego seeking to push itself forward and impress itself on others, seeking the stage and the limelight before a captive audience who could be guaranteed to take his words to heart (if they wanted to pass their exams). In short, one can accept that Rajneesh, at the age of twenty-one, had an experience which was much as he described it: yet it is clear that the dominative ego of the man, evident since earliest childhood, never disappeared but merely learnt to express itself in more subtly dominative ways, particularly in order to 'dehypnotize', shape and

programme his followers to put into practice his vision of a new world order.

Between his return to Pune in 1987 and his death in 1990, Rajneesh was claiming that Jesus was not enlightened, and that the Buddha, while he may have been enlightened up to a point, was nonetheless too heavily engrossed in the intellectual presuppositions and preconceptions of his day. In doing so he was quite clearly setting himself up as the only truly enlightened master; others may follow in his step (although apparently none of his followers have done so yet), but he would remain as the supremely enlightened one—as indeed the Guru par excellence, the embodiment of the goal and the one who points the way to it.

Time alone will be the judge, with Rajneesh as with all of the Gurus and teachers in this book, of the extent to which either the teachings, the personalities or the cults will survive or have any lasting influence.

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Glossary

Acharya:	A learned teacher
Advaita:	Non-Dual: the name given to the school of Monism propounded by Adi Shankaracharya.
Ananda:	Bliss.
Ashram:	Retreat or hermitage, the abode of a Guru, ascetic or holy man.
Atman:	The Soul or real inner Self.
Avatar:	An incarnation or descent to earth, especially of the god Vishnu.
Bhagavadgita:	'Song of the Lord', part of the *Mahabharata* and the most popular devotional text in Hinduism.
Bhagwan:	Lord: the title most commonly given to God.
Bhajan:	A religious song or hymn.
Bhakta:	A devotee, one who follows the path of Bhakti.
Bhakti:	Loving devotion or worship.
Brahma:	The creator-god.
Brahman:	The impersonal Absolute, the real essence of existence.
Brahmin:	A priest or member of the highest of the four castes.
Chakra:	A circle: in Tantra, one of the centres of power in the body.
Darshan:	Sight or vision: the sight of a holy person, which itself conveys blessing.
Dharma:	Law, Universal law, the correct order of the universe; ones duty.
Diksha:	Initiation.
Dvaita:	Dual: the name given to the school of Dualism propounded by Madhvacharya.

Ghat: A steep place, usually the steps leading down to a bathing place.

Gita: see *Bhagavadgita.*

Jiva: An individual soul or being.

Jnana: Knowledge.

Karma: Action, deed: also, the consequence or effect of action.

Kali: The last of the four Yugas; also, the name of the goddess, wife of Shiva.

Krishna: 'Black': an avatar of Vishnu, and revealer of the *Bhagavadgita.*

Kshatriya: A member of the warrior or princely caste.

Kundalini: In Tantra, the mystical power in the body, visualized as a serpent, which must be raised through the Chakras to bring enlightenment.

Lingam: The phallus, symbol of Shiva.

Mahabharata: One of the two great epics of india, which centres on the war between the Kurus and Pandavas.

Maharishi: Also spelt Maharshi: 'Great Rishi', a great sage.

Mantra: A sacred word, phrase or formula, especially that given by a Guru to a disciple.

Moksha: Release, especially from rebirth.

Nirvana: Blowing out, especially of the false idea of self-hood.

Pandit: A learned man.

Parampara: Succession, as from Guru to disciple.

Purana: 'Old': the eighteen books containing old traditions and stories.

Rama: An avatar of Krishna, and hero of the *Ramayana.*

Ramayana: One of the two great epics, relating the defeat by Rama of the demon-king, Ravana and the rescue of his wife, Sita.

Rishi: Sage or seer.

Sadguru: 'True Guru', or truth in the form of the Guru.

Sadhana: Spiritual discipline.

Sadhu: Holy man, ascetic or monk who has renounced the world.

Samadhi: The merging of ones self with the Absolute; also, the tomb of an enlightened Guru.

Sannyas(a): The final stage of life for a Hindu, renunciation of the world.

Sannyasin: One who has been intiated into Sannyasa.

Satya: Truth.

Shaiva: A follower or devotee of Shiva.

Shakti: Power, Divine energy: in Tantra, the female counterpart of Shiva.

Shaktipat: The fall of power, especially as transferred from Guru to disciple.

Shanti: Peace or stillness.

Shastra: A book or religious textbook of instruction.

Shishya: A pupil or disciple.

Shiva: The god of destruction and re-creation.

Shudra: A serf or worker, member of the lowest of the four castes.

Siddha: An enlightened being.

Swami: Master or lord, a title usually given to monks.

Tantra: A system of belief and practice centred on directing divine power and energy within the body to bring about enlightenment.

Tapas: Heat, especially the heat generated by ascetic practices; also, ascetic practices themselves.

Upanishad: 'Sitting at the feet': name of the predominantly Monistic scriptures traditionally taught to disciples at the feet of their Guru.

Vaishnava: A follower or devotee of Vishnu.

Vaishya: A member of the trader caste.

Veda: 'Containing knowedge': usually, the earliest of Hindu scriptures, four in number, the most important of which is the *Rig Veda*.

Vedanta: 'End of the Veda': the Upanishads, also the philosophical schools based on these.

Vishisht-advaita: Qualified Non-Dualism: the name given to the school of thought propounded by Ramanuja.

Vishnu: The god of preservation.

Yoga: Union: the path leading to union between the individual and the Absolute or God.

Yogi: One who practices Yoga.

Yuga: Age or era.

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